


REALMS OF FANTASY

A detailed illustration of a woman with long, wavy blonde hair, wearing ornate fantasy armor. She is holding a sword with a green gem in its hilt. A large black crow is perched on her shoulder, looking towards the viewer. The background is a fiery orange and red sky over a dark, rocky landscape.

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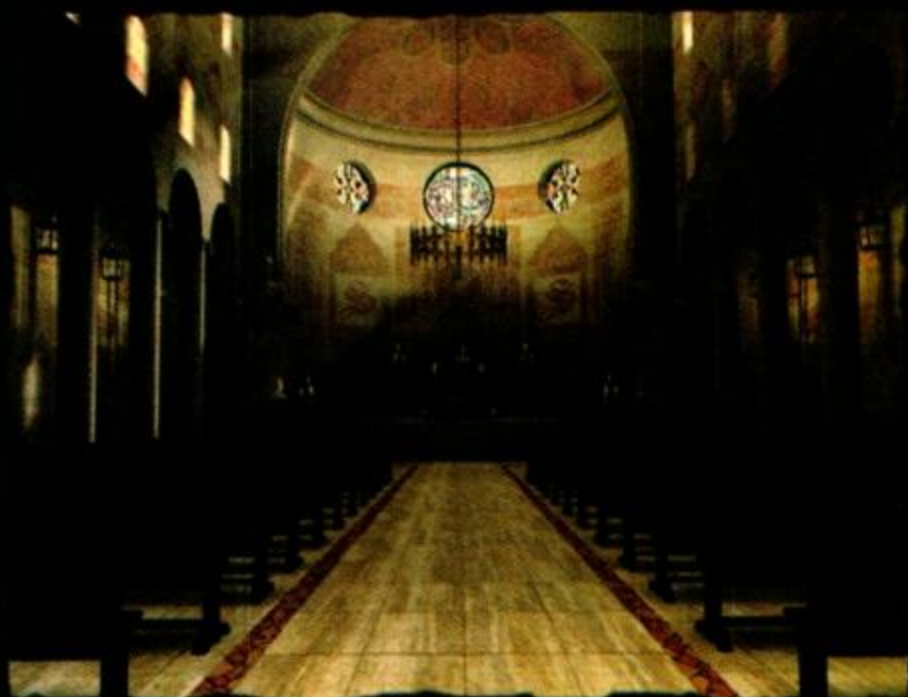


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BY GAHAN WILSON

Will Shetterly's *Dogland* explores and illuminates one of the darker crevices of history.

HISTORICAL ERAS OF GREAT UNREST IN REAL HISTORY HAVE PROVIDED MARVELOUSLY inspiring backgrounds for some of our strongest and most memorable fantastic novels and short stories, particularly those periods involving societies divided against themselves. I am surprised they are not more commonly employed.

The Civil War and its Faulknerian aftermaths; the often confusing cruelties of the Roundhead Rebellion; the sweeping events surrounding and during the Russian transition from a Tzardom to a Soviet—all of these have inspired much of the best writings by some of the best authors to have worked the blurry border separating the actual from the imagined.

One period of horrific national stress was the late '50s and early '60s here in the States when Martin Luther King and many brave others strove for freedom against forces which, as they retreat farther into the historical distance and can be viewed with more perspective, emerge as being ever more visibly cruel and stupid.

One probable reason why those inclined to fantasy

haven't gone into this epoch nearly as much as called for is that it not only remains almost intolerably painful, it is still ongoing. We are, historically, not so much in its aftermath as in its continuation. Only a few of its challenges have been truly met by our society, almost none of its basic problems have been really solved.

And—let's face it—fantasists often do use their art as an avenue of escape rather than as a means of exploration. It's a perfectly valid employment of the art, I've gone that way myself on many occasions, but even flight is better executed if the realities to be fled from are better understood.

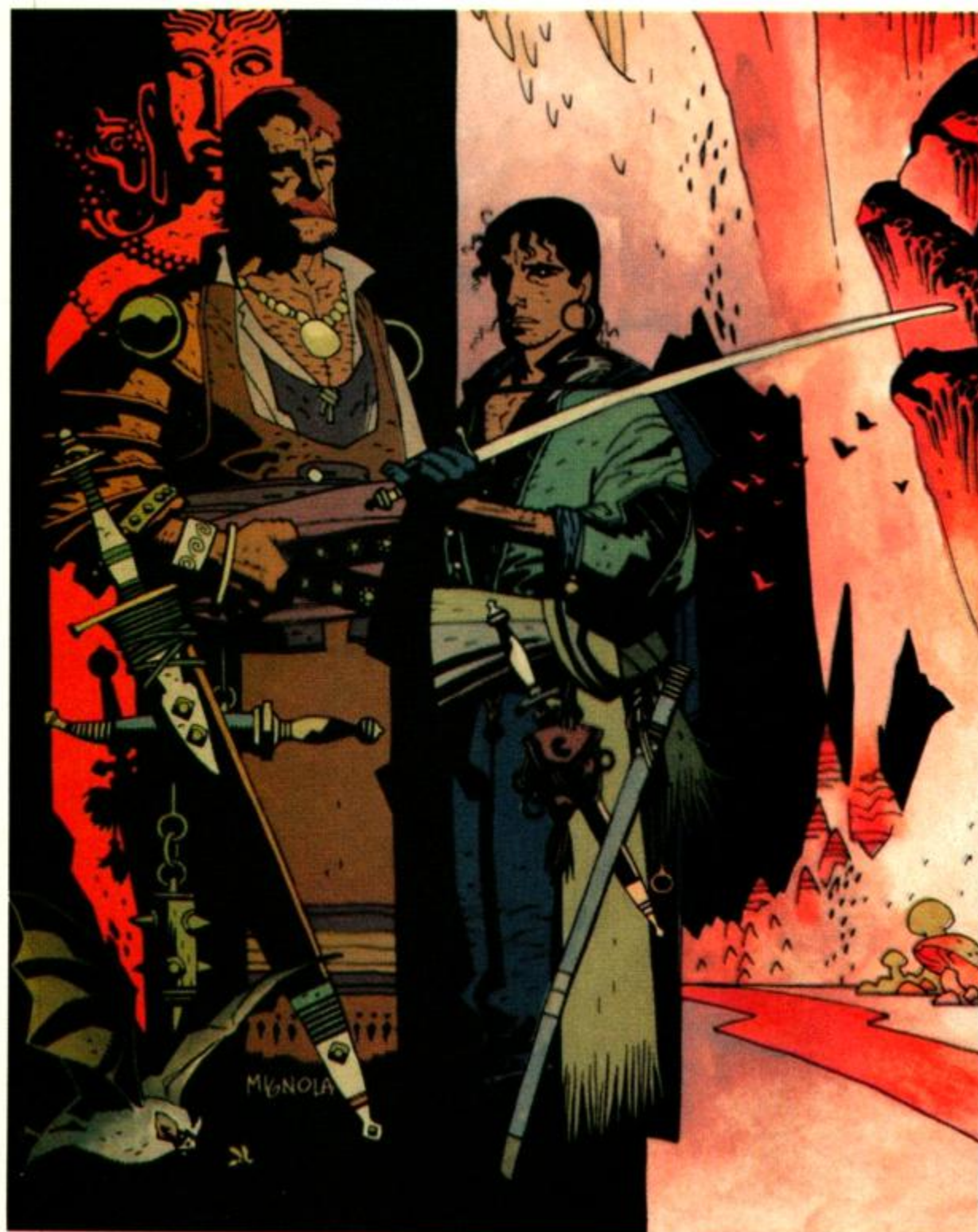
Things *are* better than they were back then. Although in moments of despond, such as when viewing riots on television and hearing in-depth interviews with victims of the apparently bottomless sufferings our newly named "underclass" must endure down to being awakened—occasionally to their own or to their children's deaths—it does seem hard to believe that things really are better.

I was brought up in the North, the Midwest to be exact, and in that area, to a lucky white child such as myself, wearing the blinders fitted on me by my parents as did all my middle-class childhood friends, the injustices going on were usually distant and dimly perceived if not entirely invisible.

I came into contact with blacks only as maids and porters and assistants to white handymen. I knew they lived apart in other areas which I only rarely glimpsed out of the family car's windows when my father could not avoid driving through them. It took a long time for it to dawn on me that they were very purposefully placed in easily avoidable locations.

My on-scene viewing of the South was restricted to the annual drives we would take down and up its pleasant landscape as we went to and from our Christmas vacation in Florida. Florida was not viewed as part of the South at all but as a huge sort of pre-Disneyland. I noticed that Florida *did* have some of the same sorts of obvious restrictions the South did, only they tended to be much more proper and genteel. Outstanding among them were the demure little signs placed very visibly at the entrances to absolutely all the Fort Lauderdale hotels. They read, in the sort of fancy script usually reserved for engraved wedding invitations: *This Establishment Caters*

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The worst event of all those trips—and many awful events there were—took place one time we stopped over in Atlanta. It was, as it is now, a handsome and interesting town and I took my 11- or 12-year old self off shortly after we'd checked into the hotel in order to wander through Atlanta's downtown and look it over during the peak of its busy afternoon.

It was a bright, sunny day, I had a dollar or two to spend on souvenirs or comic books, and all seemed very well, indeed, when all of a sudden a car full of laughing young white men pulled abruptly to the curb only a few yards ahead of me and two of the men jumped out and grabbed a pretty black woman and dragged her screaming back along the sidewalk.

I remember standing there for a second waiting for one of the many grown-up pedestrians in the crowd about me to do something about this awful event and when I saw that none of them was even *looking* at it I began to shout at all of them, more and more loudly and angrily.

"They're taking that girl!" I remember yelling, waving one arm and pointing frantically with the other at what was going on. "They're taking that girl!"

But nobody did anything at all. Nobody even glanced openly in their direction as the young men hauled the screaming woman in, slammed the door, and drove away with an astounding, infuriating leisureliness as nobody in that whole stupid Goddamned crowd of cattle did a single Goddamned thing.

So things are better.

Anyhow, Will Shetterly's *Dogland* (Tor Books, New York, NY, 448 pages, hardcover, \$25.95), a book I very much enjoyed, *does* employ fantasy to usefully explore and effectively illuminate some of the darker crevices of that era and I say good for him. It is billed as "young adult," and will without doubt be helpful for those in that group of the population, but adult adults should not be put off as it will in no way insult whatever maturity they may have succeeded in acquiring since having been young.

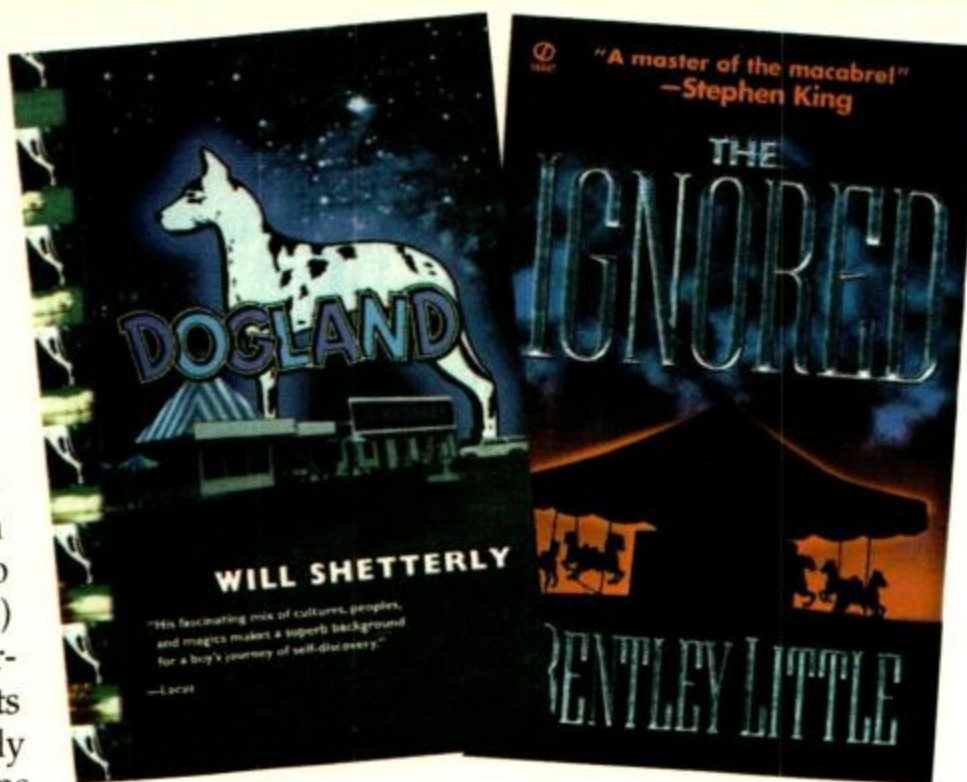
The story is about the Nix family, a mother and father and their three kids, who migrate from Wisconsin down to Latchahee County, Florida, nearby the Suwannee River, with the vaguely loopy idea of opening a roadside attraction that will display all the major breeds of dogs for the education and possible edification of paying tourists. The middle class of that period, it should be pointed out, were by no means as sophisticated as contemporary canine collectors and mostly owned cocker spaniels, Scotties and your basic terriers. The sight of an Irish wolfhound or a Lhasa apso being led down the Main Street of any American town of

1959 would have been just cause for eye bugging and jaw dropping, indeed!

Shetterly uses what might be called the subversive/pervasive attack in his fantasy. The center of it is a solid and well-realized world full of minutely detailed family history and careful listings of global events (the narrator always writes out a succinct summing up of each year's major headline doings to make sure you're properly oriented) but there are often gently odd overtones and vague eeriness to the events and places and characters the family encounters. Hints abound. Omens accumulate.

Unexplained men of menacing mien turn up during the course of the Nix children's births (often chaotic affairs) and make ominous oracular statements; a bizarre accident during the Nixes initial examination of their new property involving a huge, decapitated rattler strongly demonstrates Florida is not without its primitive dangers: There appears to be a working Fountain of Youth at a nearby hotel and the girlfriends of a brooding young man named Johnny Tepes (as in Vlad, the Impaler) go ashen and listless after heavy dates.

Some of the strange folk encountered are gentle and wise, albeit often with an unnervingly long-range point of view of the sort en-



countered in the more convincing tales about angels. One of these is Ethorne Hawkins, a black man of unguessable and highly mysterious age who has gracefully abided and survived much unkindness from white people through whatever long years it's been. Another is Maggie DeLyon, also of longevity difficult to gauge, a kindly pagan of the Delphic school who came here from some far place long ago and who will doubtless wander on once more when the time seems right.

Needless to say the dystrophic forces are also busily functioning in Latchahee County. They are headed up by the highly sinister Nick Lumiere, whose extreme paleness is so overwhelmingly bright in Florida sunshine or nighttime flashlight beams that one

squints in his presence and has difficulty making out the details, particularly in his face. He is sweepingly confident, wears stylish clothes that throw the light back at you as forcibly as his flesh and smoothly drives a tail-finned white convertible with its top down. His second-in-command, sometimes flunky, is currently known as Captain Jack 'Awkins in his role of owner and host of Pirate Paradise, a rival tourist attraction, but he and Ethorne share the same last name and it's obvious their acquaintance goes back a long, painful way when Ethorne calls him "Co'nel."

A number of other Jungian types interweave with these major players, the most amusing to me being a quartet of tourists (in the profound sense of the word) that visits Dogland in varying incarnations through the years, usually spending most of their time with Christopher, just to check up on how fate is working out.

The strength and effectiveness of the book comes from Shetterly's placing and playing these bizarre, occult figures against a very real and effectively stirring (note my painful memories of the time intensively activated by his book as above) account of events very true to the horrendous sort of action which was really and truly going on at the time.

In the book, as in life as it was back then, people die unfairly; are driven into perma-

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nent grief and sometimes through it into joy; do things they will never ever be able to forgive themselves for; do things way far braver than they would have ever dreamed possible of themselves, and otherwise rise and fall before the astounding challenges our country was nakedly presented with in the late '50s and early '60s. The book is therefore often painful, but Mr. Shetterly sees to it that it is also always constructively informative.

Actually I think, in spite of my usual snide reservations about the term, it would be a swell book for young adults and that responsible adult adults would do them a great favor by gently laying it in their paths.

The Ignored, by Bentley Little (Signet, New York, NY; 429 pages; paperback, \$5.99), has a blurb by Stephen King on its cover: "A master of the macabre!" A little professional secret for any of you not in the book-making industry: Any number of writers would gleefully kill for such a blurb and they would have excellent reasons for doing so.

I might as well reveal yet another terrible secret of the publishing world: Reviewers are influenced by blurbs. Hard to believe, but true. When I, for instance, saw King's praise—very difficult to miss since it was printed in boldly contrasting blood-red type above the title (and who can blame them?)—I confess I gave the book a much closer look than I might have otherwise done. And in no time at all I was hooked.

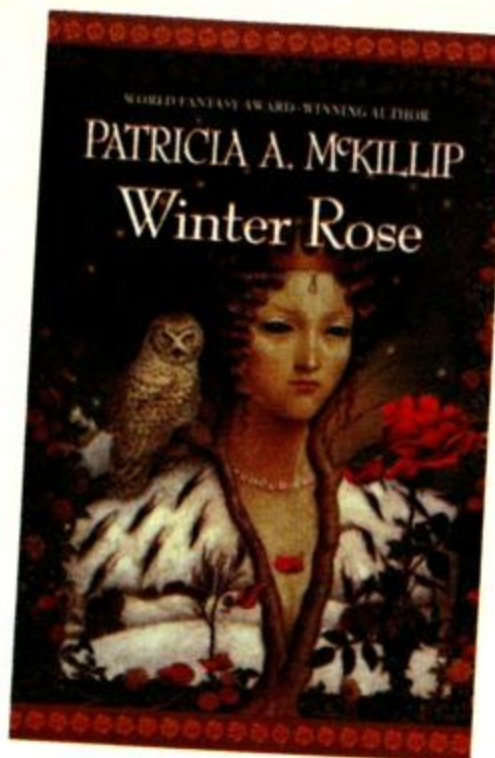
Quietly, gently, and without any literary

pretension, Bentley Little, the author, neatly creates and assembles an accumulation of nutty and amusing little scenes that manage to pull the reader ever deeper into the discouraging mire that day-to-day life presents those unable to attract much if any real attention from their fellow human beings.

Gradually, almost insidiously, Little lets it dawn on the turner of his book's pages that it's far better to be scorned, and way far better to be hated, than to be paid no serious emotional attention at all.

His hero, who has the highly ignorable name of Bob Jones, having completed his rather arbitrarily chosen college education, is about to see if he can secure a rather arbitrarily chosen means of making his livelihood in able to support himself and his wife, Jane, who may have been, one suspects, rather arbitrarily chosen.

After a vaguish interview in a room that looks like a lot of offices he has been in, and a lot of offices he will be in, Bob finds himself hired by Automated Interface, a large corporation producing business software. The news he has been hired comes to him some



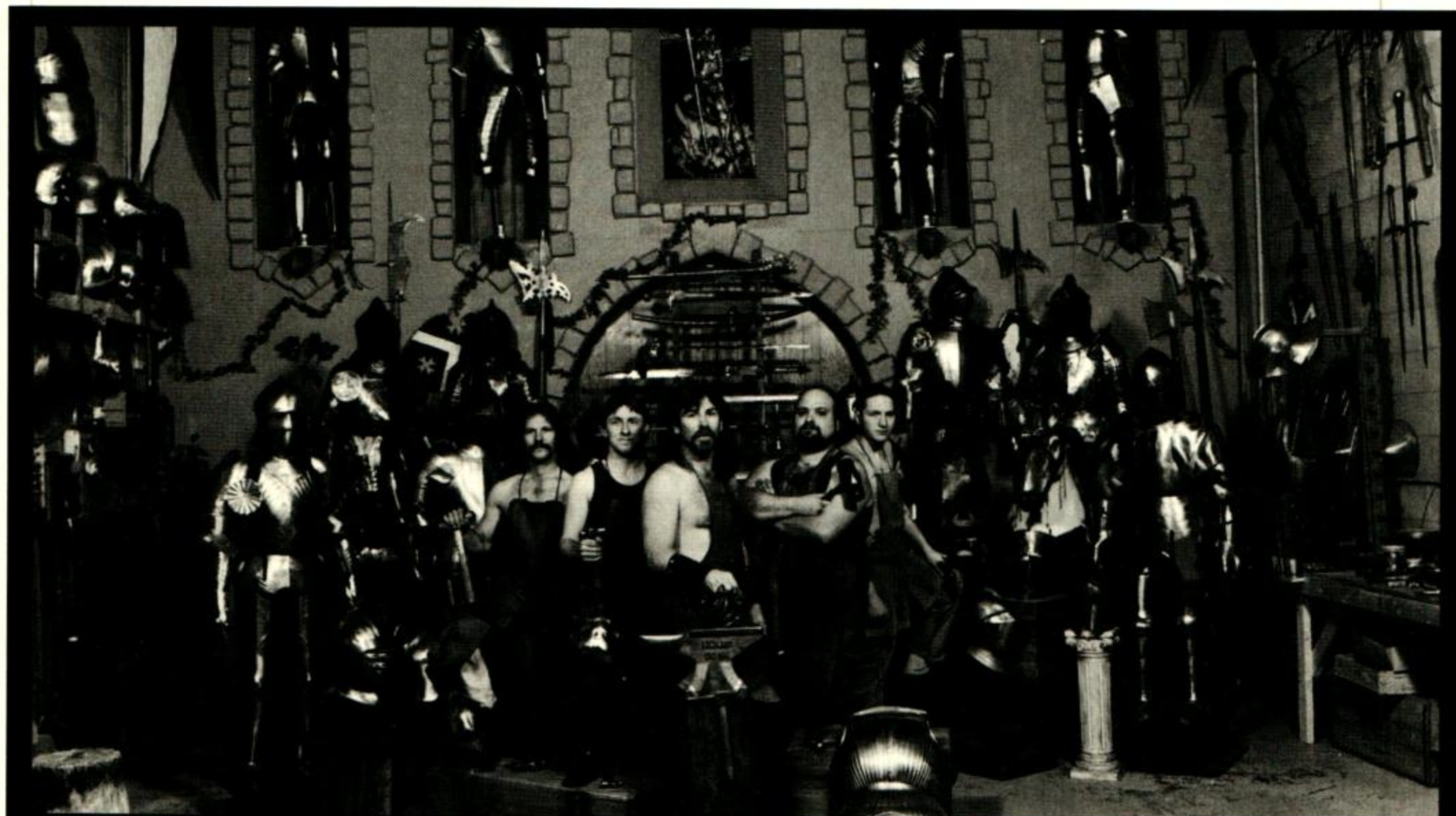
time after he's decided they weren't interested in him, and once he gets it he can think of no particular reason why they should have taken him on.

Although the book eventually escalates into apocalyptic horrors, I found its most genuinely frightening section was one early on dealing with Jones's various indoctrinations during the first day at his new job. It's clear that Bentley Little has either been deeply involved with such places as Automated Interface or has one hell of an imagination.

His first contact is with a pretty, sexy girl who has him fill out forms then watch and officially critique a company cassette. She seems to be so genuinely interested in him that he becomes concerned she may end by eventually losing control to the point of sexually seducing him and thus compromise his marriage vows but, at the end of their brief association, it dawns on him with a lurch that she has all along merely been doing her job, is only dimly aware of his existence and will forget him completely even before he has left her presence.

His next encounter is a bone-chilling interview with Ted Banks (the author's nose for

Continued on page 96



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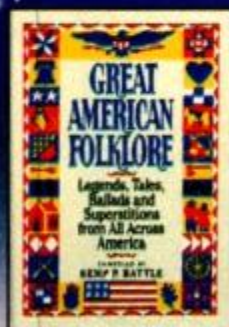
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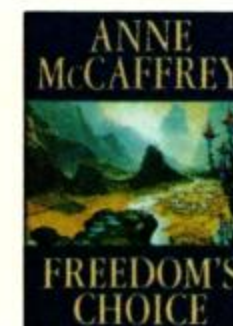
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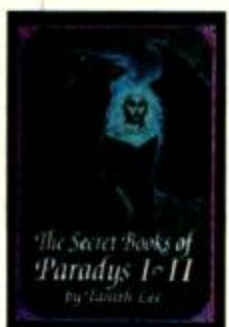
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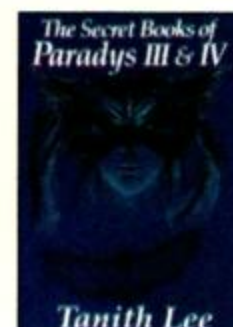
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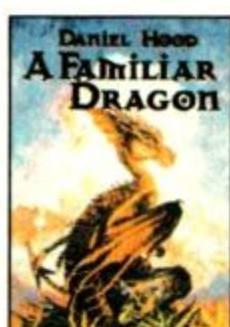
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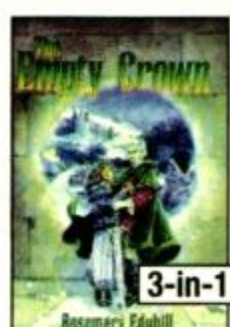
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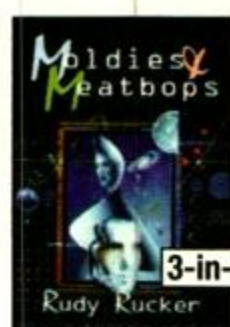
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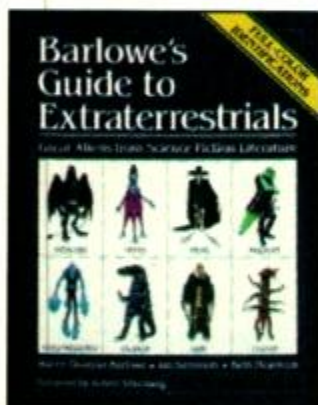
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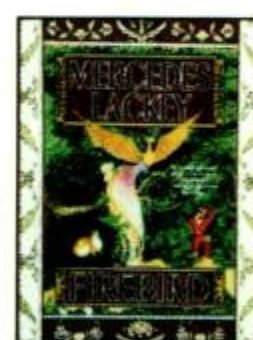
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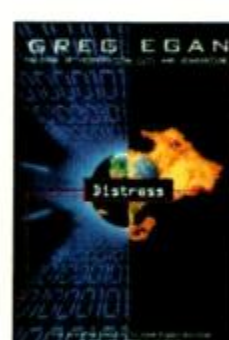
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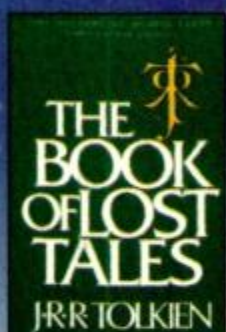
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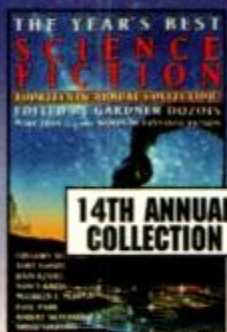
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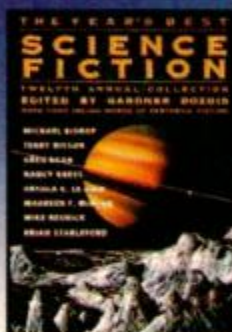
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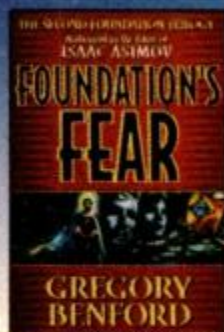
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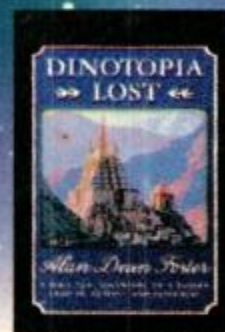
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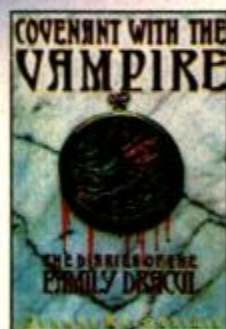
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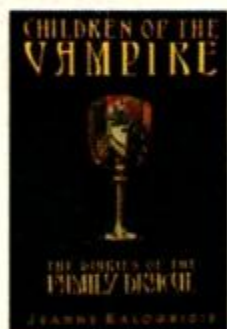
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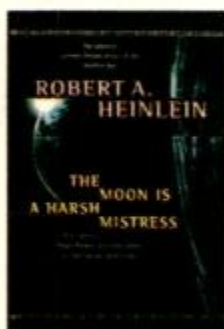
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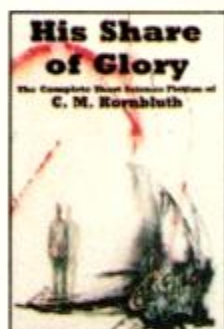
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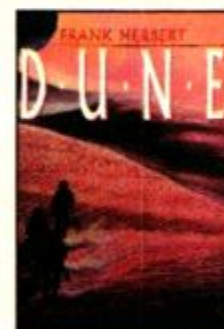
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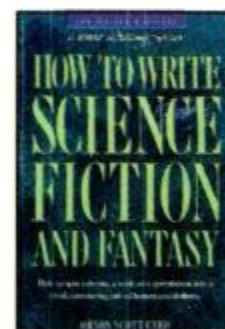
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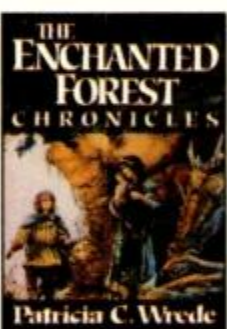
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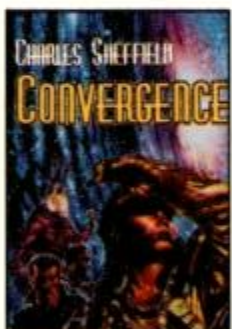
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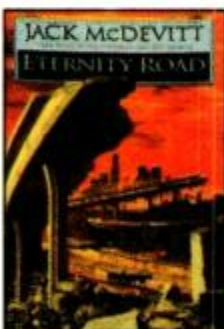
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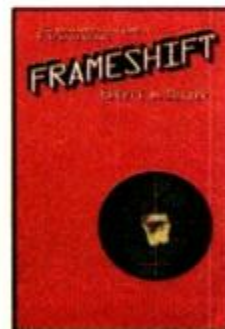
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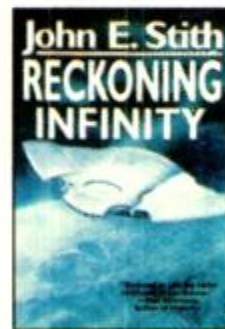
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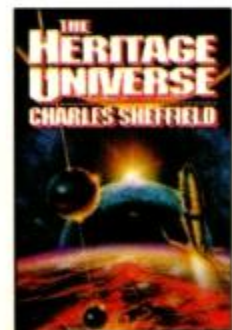
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BY TERRI WINDLING

Sacred Springs, Holy Wells, and Haunted Riversides: Legends of Water Lore

FROM MY DEVON VILLAGE IN THE WEST OF ENGLAND IT IS A SHORT DRIVE THROUGH WINDING green lanes to the once-independent kingdom of Cornwall—a land filled with ancient Celtic ruins and ancient stories. On a recent day near the summer solstice, I went to Cornwall on a morning's journey with Wendy Froud (whose husband painted the beautiful "Lady of the Waters", below), seeking the magic that lies beneath the surface of the rolling hills: water magic, pooled in crumbling holy wells and sacred springs ... and found in the myths and legends of cultures all around the world. Past the market-town of Tavistock we crossed

In Brian Froud's "Lady of the Waters," the artist's wife has posed for the figure symbolizing the mystical association of women and water.

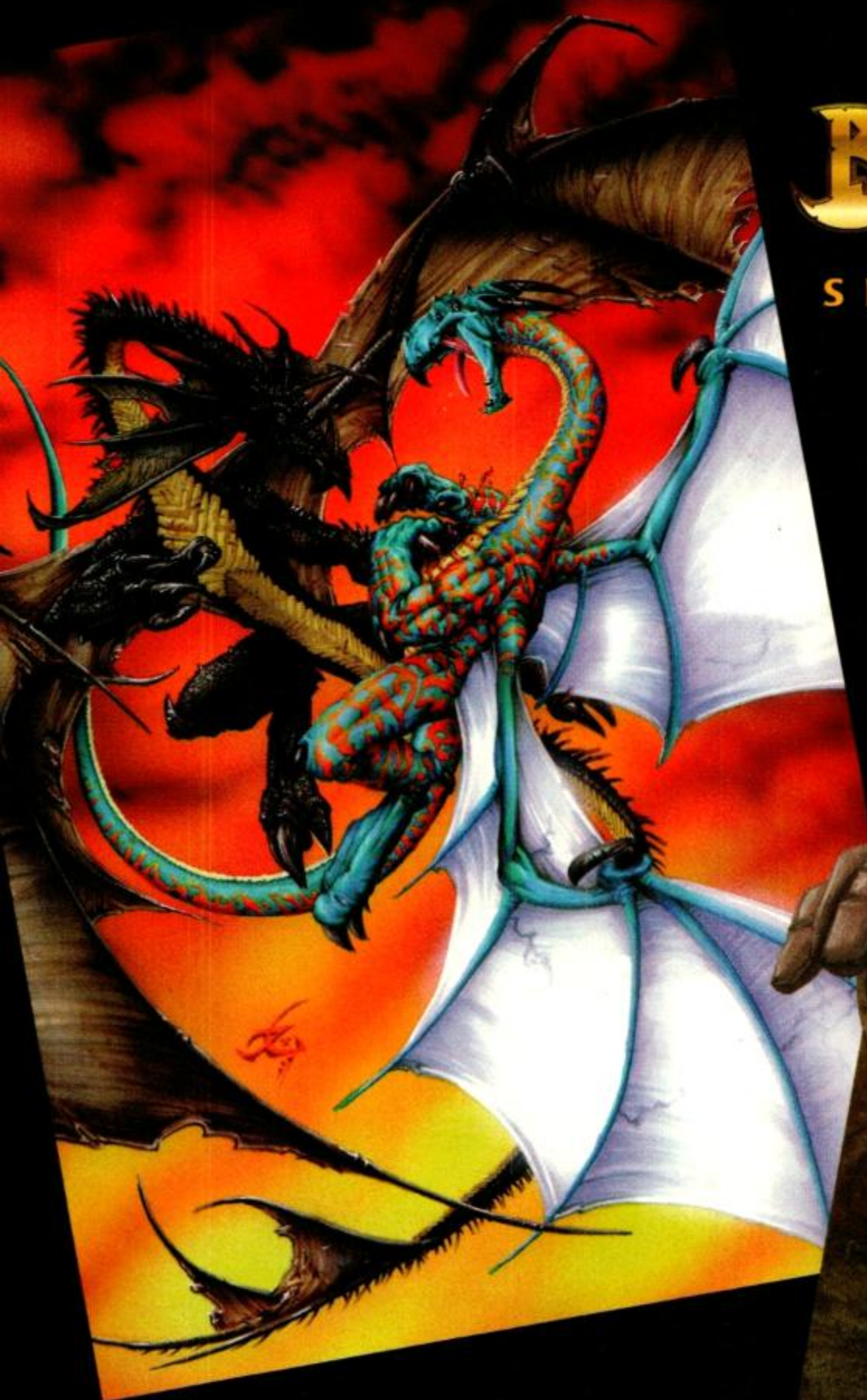
the county line from Devon into Cornwall, a peninsula of land in the far southwestern corner of Britain. A mile or so past the village of Callington we parked at the edge of a farmyard, and followed the footpath through the fields that led to Dupath Well. Like many of the ancient holy wells to be found in Cornwall (and through all of Britain), the spring that runs through Dupath Well was

probably a sacred site to tribal people in the distant past, its older use now overlaid with a gloss of Christian legendry. At one time this spring may have sat in a woodland grove of oak, rowan, and thorn—trees sacred to the Druids and other animist religions. In 1510, a group of Christian monks claimed the site for their own use, enclosing the spring in a small well-house made out of rough-hewn stone. This was the common fate of many pagan sacred sites in the British Isles. Unable to dissuade the local people from visiting their holy places, Christian missionaries simply took them over—building churches where standing stones once stood and baptistries over sacred springs, cutting down groves of oak, rowan, and thorn in a new god's name. One can still find numerous holy wells buried in the Cornish countryside, many of them now named for the saints and associated with their miraculous lives. But scratch the surface of these legends and older stories emerge like a palimpsest, stories of faery creatures, the knights of Arthur, and the old gods of the land.

Inside the tiny chapel-like building erected over Dupath Well, the holy water pools in a shallow trough carved from a single granite slab. The air feels thick, heavy with shadows, with silence, with the ghosts of men and women drawn to this spot for hundreds of years. The stones are worn where they once knelt and prayed to the Virgin Mary, or to the Goddess of the Sacred Springs. At the bottom of the trough lay a few copper coins—a modern custom of making wishes not so very different from the pagan practice of throwing pins into a well to ask for blessings. I watched as Wendy placed an offering of wildflowers by the water—an equally ancient practice recalling a time when it was the land itself our ancestors worshipped, prayed to, and thanked for the gift of life.

Today, with clean water piped directly into our homes and largely taken for granted, it takes a leap of imagination to consider the greater importance of water to those who fetched it daily from the riverside or village well. Deeply dependent on the local water source for their crops and animals, our ancestors had a natural reverence for those places where good, pure water emerged like magic from the depths of the earth. As a result, water has played a role in myth, folklore, and sacred rites in cultures all around the globe—particularly in arid lands





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where the gift of water is most precious.

According to a Blackfoot creation myth, in the beginning there was a great womb containing all of the animals, including Old Man. One day the womb burst, and all creation was under water. Old Man and the animals emerged from the womb floating on a large raft. One day Old Man suggested that Beaver dive down and try to bring up some mud. Beaver was gone a very long time, but still he could not reach bottom. Loon tried, Otter tried, but the water was just too deep for them. Finally little Muskrat tried; he was gone so long that he was nearly dead when they pulled him into the raft again—yet he clutched a precious bit of mud in one of his little claws. From this mud, Old Man formed the lands of Earth to emerge from that great ocean of water, and then he created all of the peoples, trees, and plant-life upon it. We find variations of this "diver motif" myth not only throughout North America but in cultures around the world—including Buriat cosmology, Finnish folktales, and the Hindu Paranas.

Many cultures associate water with women: with the Goddess, or several goddesses, or a variety of female nature spirits. The Kung bushmen of Botswana attribute the origin of water to women, granting them special power over it. All-mother, in an Aboriginal myth from northern Australia, arrived from the sea in the form of a rainbow serpent with children (the Ancestors) inside her. It was All-mother who made water for the

Ancestors by urinating on the land, creating lakes, rivers, and water holes to quench their thirst. The "living water" (running water) of springs and natural fountains is particularly associated in ancient mythological systems with women, fertility, and childbirth. To the Greeks, springs were the haunts of water nymphs, elemental spirits who took the form of beautiful young girls; the original meaning of the Greek word for spring is "nubile maiden." Certain Greek springs were sacred to Hera or Aphrodite and reputed to have miraculous powers; Hera, for instance, regained virginity each year through immersion in the fountain of Kanathos. In Teutonic myth, the shaggy wood-wife who loves the hero Wolddietrich is transformed into a gentle human girl when she's baptized in a sacred fountain. The Norse God Odin seeks wisdom and cunning from the fountain of the nature spirit Mimir; he sacrifices one of his eyes in exchange for a few precious sips of the water. In Celtic myth, the salmon of knowledge swims in a sacred spring or pool under the shade of a hazel tree; the falling hazelnuts contain all the wisdom of the world, swallowed by the fish.

Ritual washing in water, or immersion in a pool, has been part of various religious systems since the dawn of time. The priests of ancient Egypt washed themselves in water twice each day and twice each night; in Siberia, ritual washing of the body—accompanied by certain chants and prayers—was

a part of shamanistic practices. In Hindu, "ghats" are traditional sites for public ritual bathing, an act by which one achieves both physical and spiritual purification. In strict Jewish households, hands must be washed before saying prayers and before any meal including bread; in Islam, mosques provide water for the faithful to wash before each of the five daily prayers. In Christian tradition, baptism is described by St. Paul as "a ritual death and rebirth which simulates the death and resurrection of Christ." According to mythologist Mircea Eliade, "Immersion in water symbolizes a return to the pre-formal, a total regeneration, a new birth, for immersion means a dissolution of forms, a reintegration into the formlessness of pre-existence; and emerging from the water is a repetition of the act of creation in which form was first expressed."

The idea of regeneration through water is echoed in pan-cultural tales about the miraculous Fountain of Youth. So pervasive were these legends that in the 16th century the Spanish conquistador Ponce de Leon actually set out to find it once and for all—and found Florida instead. In Japanese legends, the white and yellow leaves of the wild chrysanthemum confer blessings from Kiku-Jido, the chrysanthemum boy who dwells by the Fountain of Youth. These leaves are ceremonially dipped in *sake* to assure good health and long life. One Native American story describes the Fountain of Youth created



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by two hawks in the nether-world between Heaven and Earth—but this fountain brings grief as those who drink of it outlive their children and friends ... and eventually it's destroyed.

To the Celtic people of the British Isles, certain waters were deemed to have regenerative, healing properties and thus were under divine protection. The famous hot spring at Bath (Aquae Sulis) was dedicated to the Goddess Sulis, who was linked from Roman times with one of the Roman's own goddesses, to become Sulis Minerva. (The Romans built a temple on the site, and a magnificent public bath house which still stands today.) The standing stones and circles of Britain are generally found near wells or running water, attesting to the importance of water in pagan religious rites. With the spread of Christianity, a concerted effort was made to stamp out the older animist religions, which attributed divinity to nature. In the fifth century, a canon issued by the Second Council of Arles stated uncategorically: "If in the territory of a bishop infidels light torches or venerate trees, fountains, or stones, and he neglects to abolish this usage, he must know that he is guilty of sacrilege." Despite the destruction of ancient holy sites, pagan beliefs proved harder to eradicate. By the seventh century, Pope Gregory decided on a new approach and instructed St. Augustine to convert sacred sites to Christian use. Pagan wells became holy wells; churches



The water nymphs depicted in this famous Pre-Raphaelite painting by John William Waterhouse are drawn from the legends of ancient Greece.

were built upon them or beside them—yet the old ways must have persisted for in the 10th, 11th, and 12th centuries a stream of edicts was issued denouncing the worship of "the sun or the moon, fire or flood, wells or stones or any kind of forest tree." Over time, however, pagan and Christian practices slowly blended together. Wells named after Christian saints were celebrated with festivals and rites on old pagan holy days, in ways that would not have been unfamiliar to "heathen" people.

On the Isle of Man, for instance, holy wells are frequented on August 1, a festival called Lughnasad (a day once sacred to the Celtic god Lugh.) August 1 is Lammas in the Christian calendar, but the older name for the holiday was still in use on the Isle of Man until the 19th century.

In Scotland, the well at Loch Maree is dedicated to St. Malrubha but its annual rites, involving the sacrifice of a bull, an offering of milk poured on the ground, and coins driven into the bark of a tree, are clearly more



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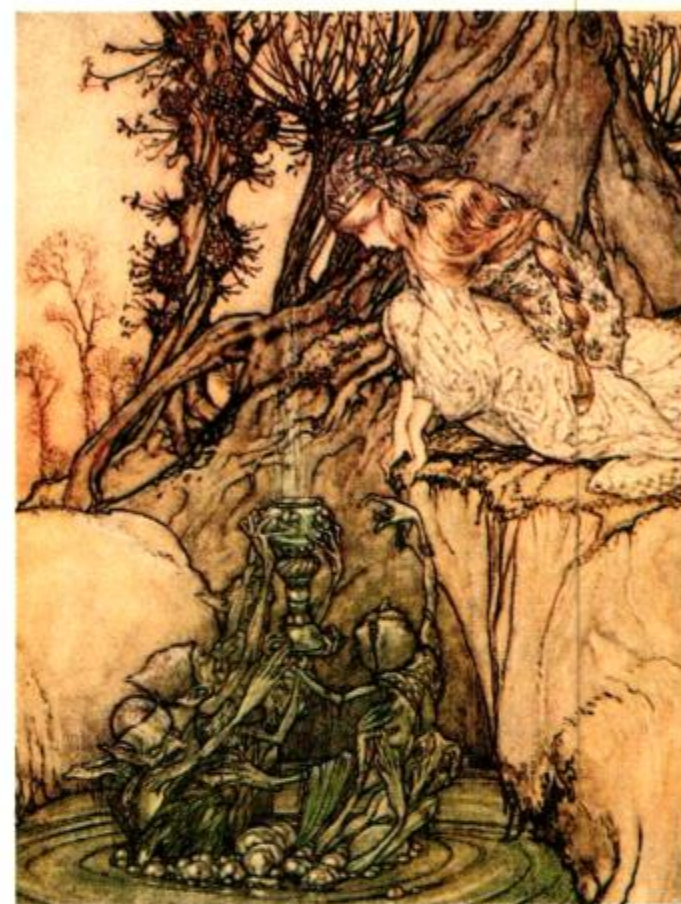
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pagan in nature.

The custom of "well dressing" is another Christian rite with pagan origins. During these ceremonies (still practiced in Derbyshire and other parts of England), village wells are decorated with pictures made of flowers, leaves, seeds, feathers, and other natural objects. In centuries past, the wells were "dressed" to thank the patron spirit of the well and request good water for the year to come; now the ceremonies generally take place on Ascension Day, and the pictures created to dress the wells are biblical in nature. (For an excellent evocation of this tradition, see John Brunner's magical story "In the Season of the Dressing of the Wells," in *The Year's Best Fantasy & Horror, Volume VI*.)

As Christian tales were attached to the springs and wells, they became as colorful as any to be found in pagan folklore. Wells were said to have sprung up where saints were beheaded, or had fought off dragons, or where the Virgin Mary appeared and left small footprints pressed into the stone. Wells dedicated to St. Anne were called "granny wells" (because, as the mother of the Virgin Mary, she was grandmother of Christ) and were attributed with particular powers concerning fertility and childbirth. According to one Breton legend, St. Anne settled in Brittany where she was visited by Christ before she died. She asked him to create a well to help the sick people of the region; he struck the ground three times, and thus the well of St. Anne-e-la-Palue was created. Up until the 19th century, the holy wells of Britain and Europe were still considered to have miraculous properties and were frequently visited by those seeking cures for disease, physical deformity, or mental illness. Other wells were famous for offering prophetic information—generally determined through the movements of the water, or leaves floating upon the water, or fish (or eels) swimming in the depths. At some wells, the water was drank from circular cups carved from animal bone, an echo of the cups carved from human skulls by the ancient Celts. Pins (usually bent), coins, or bits of metal were common offerings; rags tied to trees around the holy well were another tradition dating back to pagan times (the cloth was symbolic of ill health or misfortune left behind as one departed). Some wells, known as cursing wells, were rather less beneficent; curses were made by dropping special cursing stones into the well, or the victim's name written on a piece of paper, or a wax effigy. At the famous cursing well of Ffynnon Elian (in Wales) one could arrange for a curse by paying the well's guardian a fee to perform an elaborate cursing ritual. A curse could also be removed at this same well, for a somewhat larger fee.

In the mid-19th century Thomas Quiller Couch (father of the writer Sir Arthur Quiller Couch) became interested in the history of sacred wells in Britain; he spent much of his life wandering the wilds of his native Corn-



Enchanted wells can be found in many folk tales and fairy tales—as portrayed here by the great English illustrator Arthur Rackham.

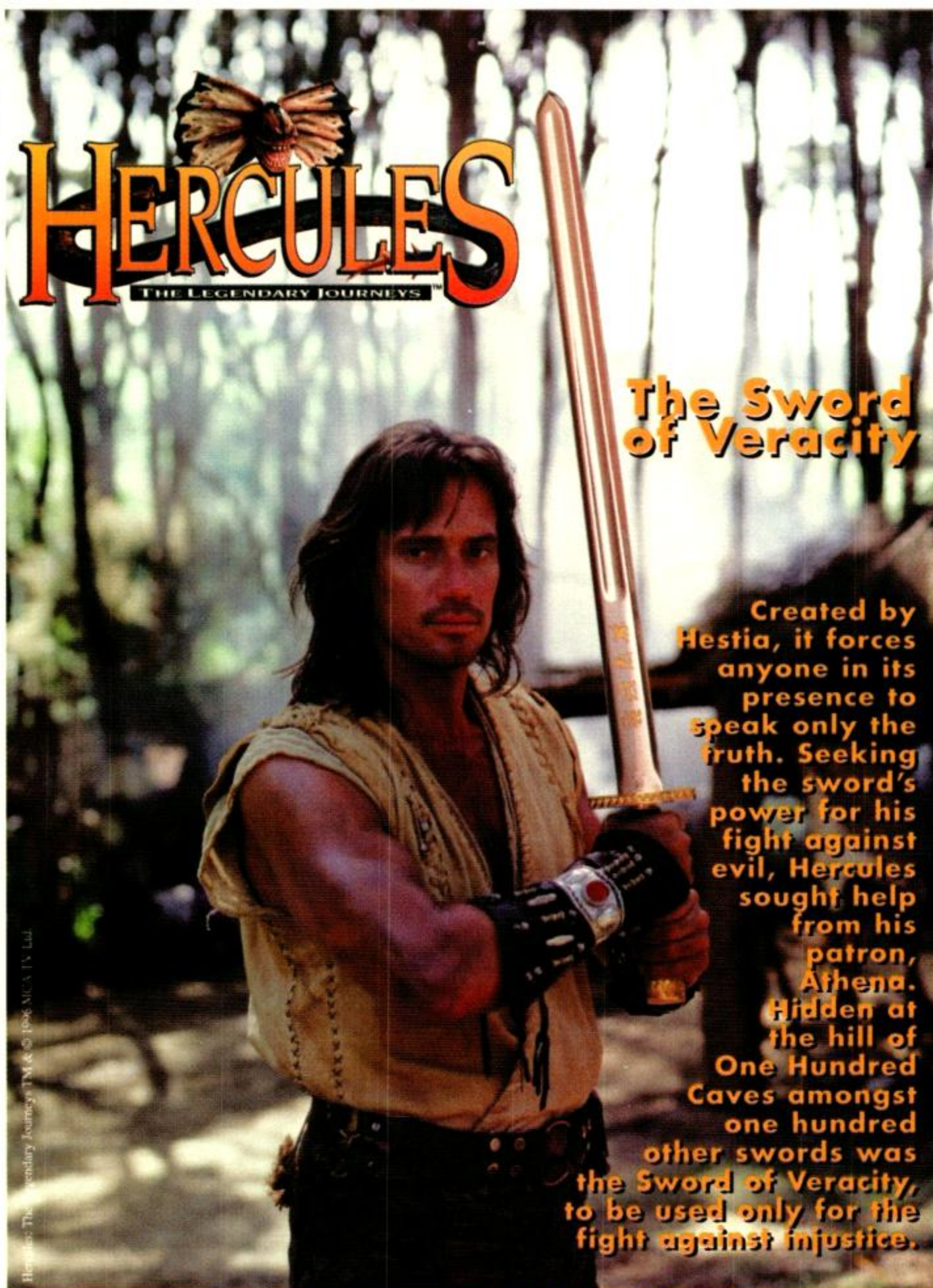
wall seeking them out. Extensive notes on this project were discovered among his papers after his death, and in 1884 *The Ancient and Holy Wells of Cornwall* was published by the antiquarian's daughters, the Misses M. & L. Quiller Couch. This fascinating book is somewhat difficult to come by today, but a more recent guide to the subject—citing Quiller Couch's text—is now available. Folklorist/photographer Paul Broadhurst re-visited the sites documented by Quiller Couch and in 1991 he published *Secret Shrines: In Search of the Old Holy Wells of Cornwall*, an informative guide to the many sacred wells still to be found in the Cornish countryside (Pendragon Press, Box 888, Launceston, Cornwall, U.K.). In addition to holy sites dedicated to Celtic goddesses and Christian saints, Broadhurst discovered crumbling old wells half-buried in ivy, bracken, and briars, inhabited by spirits somewhat less exalted: the piskies (faeries) of Cornish folklore. Wells under the protection of the piskies are not wells to be trifled with, for the piskies will take their revenge on any who dare to disturb their homes. A farmer decided to move the stone basin at St. Nun's Well (also known as Piskey's Well), with the intention of using it as a water trough for his pigs. He chained the stone to two oxen and pulled it to the top of a steep hill—whereupon the stone broke free of the chains, rolled downhill, made a sharp turn right, and settled back into its place. One of the oxen died on the spot, and the farmer was struck lame. (This rather enchanted-looking well can still be found in the beautiful part of Cornwall between Liskeard and Looe.)

All running water (not just spring water) can prove to be the haunt of faeries, for crossing over (or through) running water is one of the ways to enter their realm. One still finds country folk who avoid running water by dusk or dark, for the spirits who inhabit

water can be troublesome, even deadly. The water spirit of the River Dart, for instance, is believed to demand sacrificial drownings, leading to the well-known local rhyme "Dart, Dart, cruel Dart, every year she claims a heart." The water-wraith of Scotland is thin, ragged, and invariably dressed in green, haunting riversides by night to lead travelers to a watery death. In the Border Country, the Washer by the Ford wails as she washes the grave clothes of those who are about to die; this frightening apparition is similar to the dreaded Banshees of Irish legends. The Bean-nighe is a similar creature found in both Highland and Irish lore, a dangerous little faerie with ragged green clothes and webbed red feet. (Yet if one can get between the Bean-nighe and her water source, she is obliged to grant three wishes and refrain from doing harm.) Jenny Greenteeth specializes in dragging children down in stagnant pools. The Welsh water-leaper *Llamhigyn Y Dwr* is a toad-like creature who delights in tangling fishing lines and devouring any sheep who fall into the river. The *fideal* is a faery who haunts lonely pools and hides herself in the grasses by the water; the *glaistig*, half-woman and half-goat, tends to lurk in the dark of caves behind waterfalls. The *loireag* of the Hebrides is a gentler breed of water fairy, although—as a connoisseur of music—even she can prove dangerous to those who dare to sing out of tune.

In Ireland, a faerie creature known as the Lady of the Lake bestows blessings and good weather to those who seek her favor; in some towns she is still celebrated (or propitiated) at mid-summer festivals. Her name recalls the Welsh Lady of the Lake, who gave King Arthur his sword and now guards over his body as he sleeps in Avalon. Brittany, on the west coast of France, also claims the home of the Lady of the Lake. The Chateau de Comper, where she is said to have lived and raised Sir Lancelot, still stands near the old Forest of Paimpont (called Broceliande in Arthurian lore): a magnificent manor house of golden stone, crumbling romantically at the edges. Nearby is a lake whose origin is attributed to Morgan Le Fay, located in the mysterious Val san Retour (Valley of No Return). In Somerset, the town of Glastonbury is one of several sites where the Holy Grail is reputed to be hidden. At the foot of ancient Glastonbury Tor is a lovely garden where one can drink the red-tinged water of Chalice Well—colored, according to legend, by the blood of Christ carried in the Grail. Although the well's association with Arthur may be (as some Arthurian scholars suggest) a legend of recent vintage, archaeological excavations in the 1960s established the site's antiquity—and the place manages to retain a tranquil, mystical atmosphere despite its transformation from sacred site to tourist attraction. One often finds small offerings in the circle around the well's heavy lid: flowers, feathers, stones, small bits of cloth tied

Continued on page 34



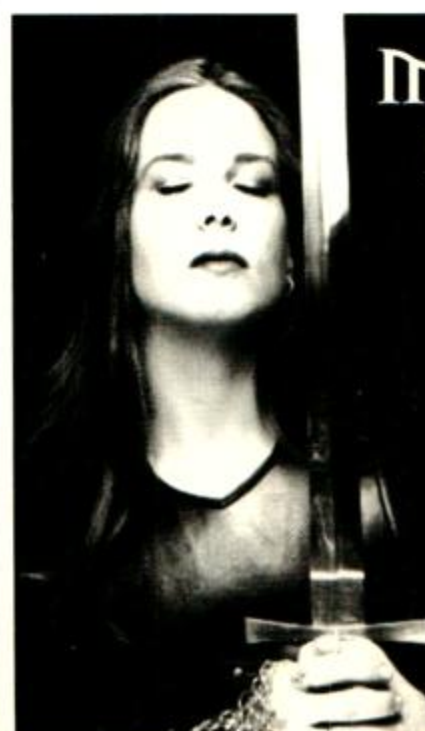
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BY DAN PEREZ

With a wealth of great fantasy books out there, how come there aren't more fantasy movies?

THIS IS A DIFFICULT COLUMN TO WRITE SOMETIMES, MAINLY BECAUSE THERE ARE RELATIVELY FEW FANTASY MOVIES THAT COME OUT EACH YEAR. Science fiction movies are booming, but it's often a scramble to find a fantasy movie to write about when deadline time approaches. It's a pity, too, because I like a good fantasy film as much as any science fiction flick—a product of growing up watching Ray Harryhausen movies like *The Seventh Voyage of Sinbad* and *Jason and the Argonauts*. Timing is a factor, too, given the magazine's bimonthly schedule. Sometimes there will be a promising fantasy movie on the horizon, but it can be tricky to have the magazine's due date coincide closely enough with the movie's.

Why doesn't Hollywood make more fantasy films? There's a wealth of great fantasy books out there, ripe for the plucking. I'd personally love to see some of Fritz Leiber's work adapted to the big screen, especially the Fafhrd and Gray Mouser series. But I don't think Hollywood takes fantasy very seriously a lot of the time, particularly when it comes to sword-and-sorcery tales. These often are bargain-basement productions, jazzed up by humor and/or a little T & A. (Thinking back, most of the Harryhausen films were bargain basement, too, but his terrific creatures are fondly remembered). Can you imagine a thoughtful, well-budgeted version of *A Wizard of Earthsea*? *Lord Foul's Bane*? *The Elric Saga*? *The*

Call of Cthulhu? In any case, on this lean month, I thought we'd look backward and forward in time a bit, recommending a couple of good movies on video and sharing news of movies coming up.

When was the last time you watched *Conan the Barbarian*? I know, it comes on TV pretty often, but it's usually been hacked and slashed by the censors. It deserves to be rented and seen in its entirety (*sans* commercials is always a plus, too). This, of course, is the movie that made Arnold Schwarzenegger a huge international star, and it's got a lot going for it. It does capture a good deal of the robust flavor of the Robert E. Howard books, and the production design (done by well-known genre artists Ron Cobb and William Stout) is great. James Earl Jones is great as the evil snake lord Thulsa Doom, and Sandahl Bergman impresses as Conan's one true love. Max Von Sydow also appears in a brief cameo. Basil Poledouris (*Lonesome Dove*) composed a rousing score for the film. *Conan the Barbarian* remains one of the best examples of the sword-and-sorcery film.

And for something considerably different, check out *Peggy Sue Got Married*. I would have included this on my list of the best fantasy movies you've never seen, had I thought of it at the time. This bittersweet story, directed by Francis Ford Coppola, stars Kathleen Turner as a middle-aged woman who magically travels back in time to her last days of high school. She's still a woman, with all her knowledge of what is to come (including infidelity by her future husband, played with a very oddball accent by Nicholas Cage), but everyone else sees her as the teenaged Peggy Sue. It's engrossing to watch her grapple with the "if I knew then what I know now" situations, and

Arnold Schwarzenegger, right, brings Robert E. Howard's Conan the Barbarian to robust life in the fantasy film that made Arnold a star.



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ABOVE: Michael Keaton has expressed interest in reprising his role as the zany demon Beetlejuice.

BELOW: Efforts are still under way to bring the popular television fantasy *Beauty and the Beast* to the big screen with Linda Hamilton and Ron Perlman reprising their roles.

Turner is excellent. Watch for Jim Carrey striking sparks in an early supporting role. Coppola's mixture of sweet nostalgia and tart, adult awareness is very appealing.

Zooming straight on into the future, here are some fantasy flicks in various stages of development:

Slated for October release, *A Life Less Ordinary* is a new movie from the *Trainspotting* crew. Danny Boyle directs, and Ewan McGregor stars as a janitor who loses his job to a high-tech vacuum cleaner. Desperate, he kidnaps his boss's spoiled-brat daughter (Cameron Diaz) and encounters two angels (Holly Hunter and Delroy Lindo) sent to intervene. Love blossoms between McGregor and Diaz in this unconventional romantic comedy. Buzz is that Sean Connery plays

the voice of God.

It's just a gleam in the producers' eyes right now, but the 1980s TV series *Beauty and the Beast* might turn up as a movie. Robert Sigman, CEO of Republic Pictures, has been seeking backers for the movie version, which will presumably feature the return of Linda Hamilton and Ron Perlman. The proposed screenplay will ignore the troubling fact that Hamilton's character died at the beginning of the third season of the show. It all sounds good on paper—the show itself was very popular, and still has a devoted fan base.

Another movie in its infancy is a sequel to 1988's *Beetlejuice*. Michael Keaton has said that he'd like to reprise the title role, and a couple of different scripts are said to exist, both written by Jonathan Gems (*Mars Attacks!*). One, titled *Beetlejuice Goes Hawaiian*, was written in the late '80s, but it's unclear whether this one or a later script will eventually be produced. Things are still pretty much up in the air on this one.

And speaking of up in the air, that's how things have been for quite a while regarding the big-screen version of *Bewitched*. It was under development for Penny Marshall's company when the director scheduled to helm the production passed away in October 1996. This took a lot of the steam out of the production, which has languished since then. One of the most intriguing aspects of the screenplay is the "Darrin" switch. Apparently there will be one Darrin for the first half and another Darrin (played by a different actor) in the second half, with only the audience aware of the switch. This mimics the recasting of Darrin halfway through the TV series run. Many actors are said to have been attached to the project, including Jerry Seinfeld.

Continued on page 32





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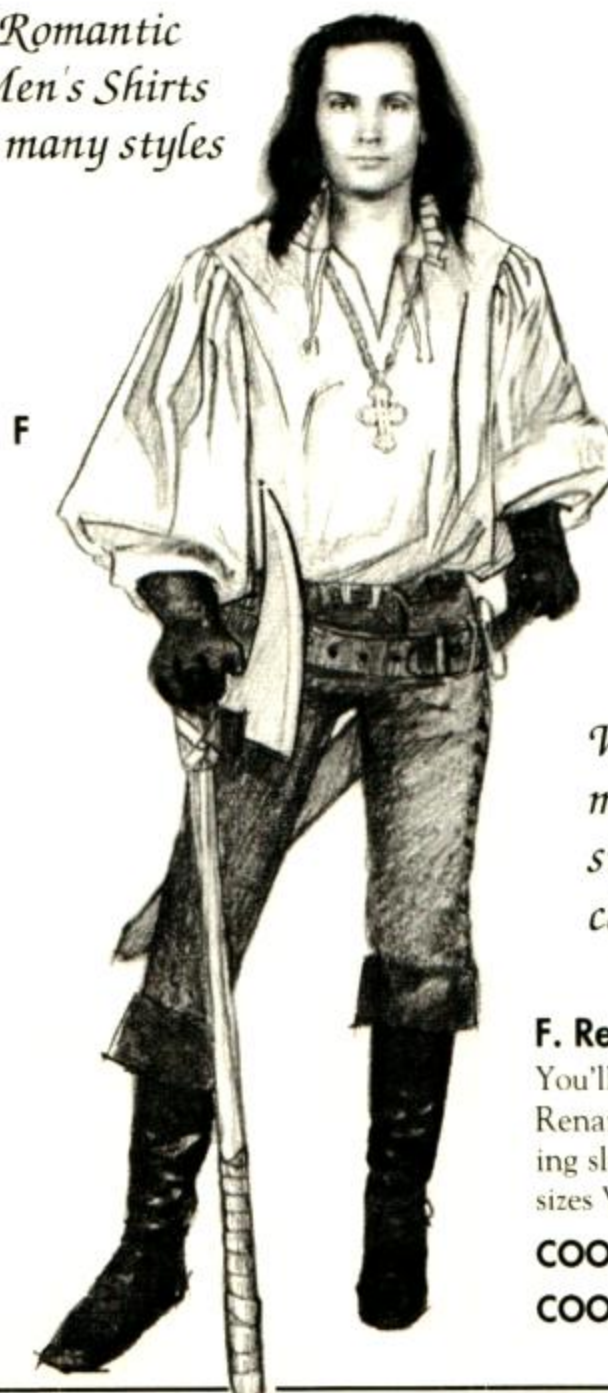
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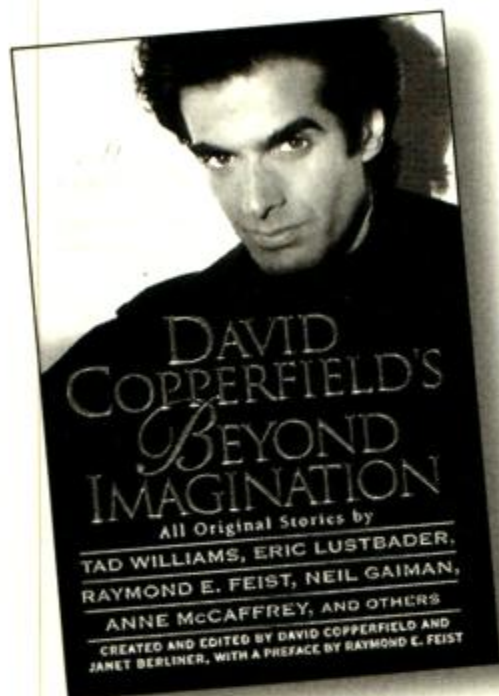
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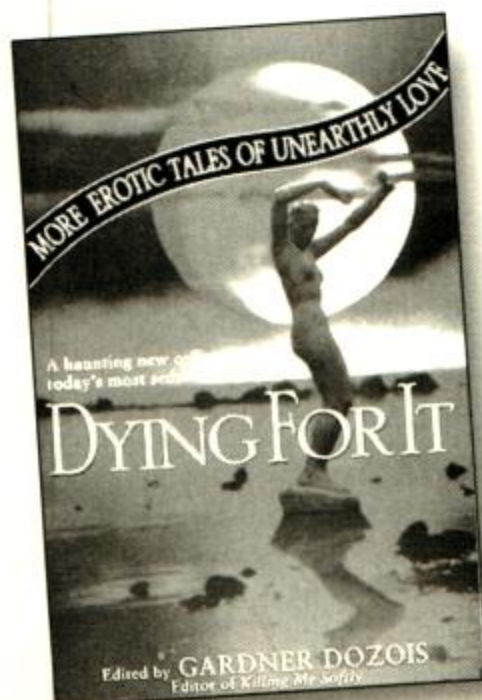
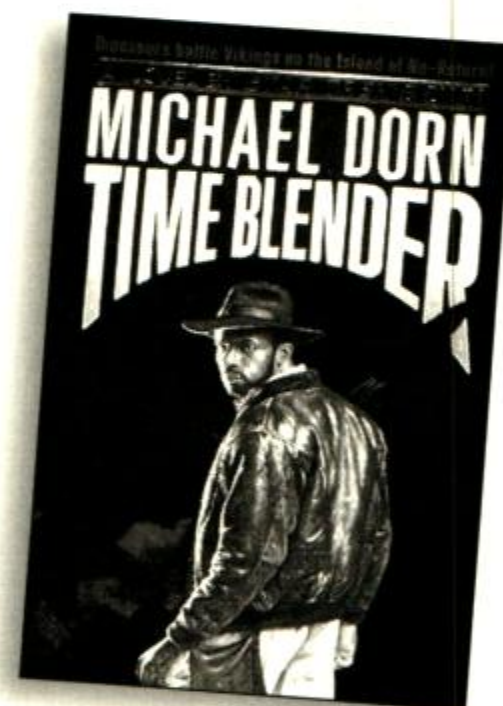
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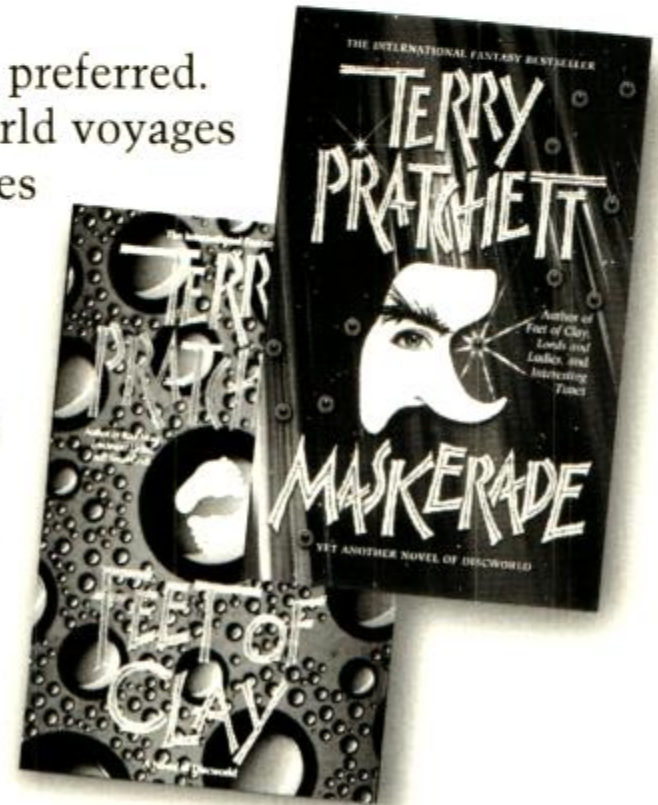
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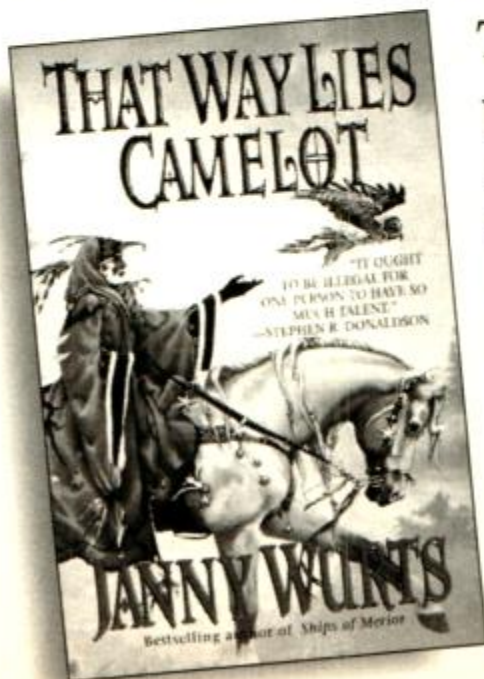
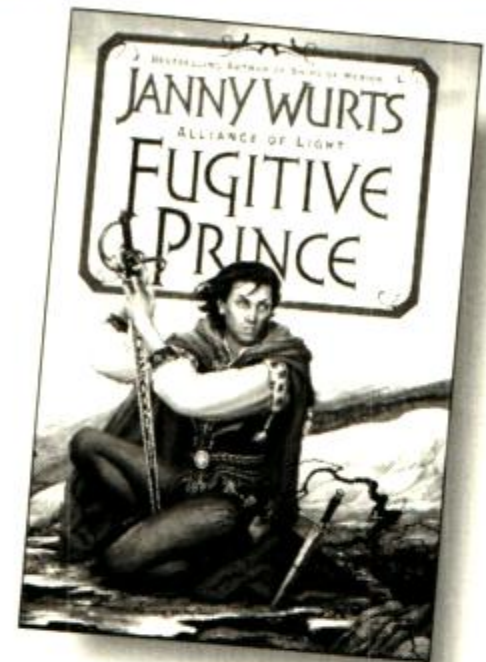


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feld, Kelsey Grammer, Robert Picardo, and Dabney Coleman as one of the two Darrins; and Lisa Kudrow, Alicia Silverstone, and Nicole Kidman up for the role of Samantha. Joan Collins has been mentioned as a possibility for the role of Sam's mother Endora.

The Grimm Brothers' Snow White (alternate title: *Snow White in the Black Forest*), scheduled to be released on Showtime in August (and videocassette thereafter) is a darker, more sensuous version of the fairy tale. Michael Cohn directs and the cast includes Monica Keena as Snow White (known as Lily in this version) and Sigourney Weaver as the evil, 125-year-old stepmother. Sam Neill, Gil Bellows, and Brian Glover round out the cast. In 15th-century Germany, Snow White/Lily flees from her stepmother's assassins, taking up refuge with a group of Bavarian outcasts and criminals.

Tentatively scheduled for fall of '97 is the remake of *Doctor Dolittle*, with Eddie Murphy in the role of the redoubtable doctor. Betty Thomas (*Private Parts*) directs and Jim Henson's creature shop will provide a variety of animals for the film, whose voices will be supplied by the likes of Richard Schiff, Norm MacDonald, Ving Rhames, Chris Rock, John Leguizamo, Jean Stapleton, and Paul Reubens. Howard Stern may also make an appearance. Will Murphy work his same remake magic that he did with *The Nutty Professor*? Stay tuned.

The Eighth Wonder of the World may be hitting the big screen again in 1998. *King Kong* has been in development by director Peter Jackson (*The Frighteners*) for some time now. Buzz has it that Jackson reportedly wants to make the movie to make up for the Dino De Laurentiis 1976 version. Other buzz has the film being delayed until 1998, so as to compete with Disney's *Mighty Joe Young* and TriStar's *Godzilla*. Jackson and longtime collaborator Frances Walsh have written the screenplay and Jackson will direct. The movie will be a period piece, with Wellington, New Zealand doubling as New York City. Jackson's New Zealand-based special effects firm Weta will be handling the visual effects, a combination of puppets and CGI (provided by 40 Silicon Graphics workstations). There will reportedly be no stop-motion effects. The dinosaurs on Kong's home island are reported to be inspired by Stan Winston's *Jurassic Park* designs. Kate Winslet, who rose to fame following her role in Jackson's *Heavenly Creatures*, is said to be a contender for the Fay Wray role.

Peter Jackson is also reportedly a front-runner to direct a new version of either *The Lord of the Rings* or *The Hobbit*. Animated versions of both of these tales have been shot, but it's presumed that the Jackson version would be live-action, featuring CGI effects for the hobbits, dwarfs, and other fantastic beings populating J.R.R. Tolkien's stories.

Walt Disney has scheduled a remake of *Mighty Joe Young* for release in the summer of 1998. The story, based on animator Willis

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ABOVE and BELOW: Due this fall is *Mortal Kombat: Annihilation*, the sequel to last summer's surprise videogame movie hit.

O'Brien's 1949 follow-up to *King Kong*, has been updated to the '90s. The 20-foot-tall gorilla grows up with a human companion, played by Charlize Theron. The duo flees Africa to escape poachers and ends up in Los Angeles, where Joe runs amok. Ron Underwood directed and Bill Paxton is cast as the male lead. Rick Baker's animatronic gorilla effects will be augmented by Dream Quest's visual effects.

Mortal Kombat turned out to be a surprise hit, based less on the videogame's popularity and more on the fact that the filmmakers actually tried to make a movie instead of a merchandising tie-in. And so *Mortal Kombat: Annihilation* will kick and chop its way into

theaters in November. James Remar will be playing the Rayden role, played by Christopher Lambert in the original. Other characters from the videogame appearing will be Rain, Jade, Mileena, Ermac, Sindel, and Noob Saibot and the three ninjas Scorpion, Sub-zero, and Reptile.

News does not bode well for Morpheus and his sister Death. Neil Gaiman's hugely popular *Sandman* comic series is simmering in development hell. Screenplay approval has reportedly been problematic, and director Roger Avary, a *Sandman* fan, has dropped out of the project over "creative differences" with producer Jon Peters. Peters apparently wants to turn *Sandman* into another Batman superhero franchise, much to the dismay of many fans. Also rumored to be in development is *Death: The High Cost of Living*, Gaiman's series devoted to Morpheus' sister, but details are very sketchy on this.

The movie adaptation of Richard Matheson's novel *What Dreams May Come* is doing somewhat better. Robin Williams and Cuba Gooding, Jr. are both attached to the project, which will be directed by Vincent Ward (*The Navigator*). The story line is a modern reworking of the Orpheus/Euridyce myth. Robin Williams and Annabella Sciorra play a husband and wife who must confront otherworldly challenges. The movie has been budgeted at \$60-70 million. No details of a shooting schedule or scheduled release dates are available. ☛



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FOLKROOTS

Continued from page 25

to a near-by tree ... remnants of ancient pagan practice carried down through the centuries.

Today, we generally view such practices as quaintly (or foolishly) superstitious; we dismiss our early ancestors as ignorant savages, worshipping natural phenomenon because they lacked the rationality of science. Yet a look at animist religions that still thrive in certain cultures around the globe indicates that this may be a simplistic view of nature-based religions. Rather than focusing on the hocus-pocus of the supernatural (as they are often portrayed), such religions are rooted in the natural world, celebrating and regulating the relationships between mankind, other species, and the land which sustains us all. In America, animism runs through the various indigenous religions of our land. Various springs, wells, and pools are sacred to native tribal groups; and in such holy places one also finds offerings similar to those by Chalice Well: feathers, flowers, stones, sage, tobacco, small carved animal forms, scraps of red cloth tied to trees, and other tokens of prayer. The Native American sweat-lodge ceremony uses water sprinkled over red-hot rocks to create the steam that is called the "breath of life"; the lodge itself is the womb of Mother Earth in which one is washed clean, purified, and spiritually reborn. Water is sacred through its absence in the four-day Sundance ceremony, or the ritual of Crying for a Vision; after four days without water (or food), the first drop on the tongue is a potent reminder to be thankful for this precious gift from Mother Earth.

The words of the Suquamish Chief Seattle upon the forced transfer of tribal lands to the U.S. Government in 1855 make painful reading in light of the ecological ravages of the past hundred years: "The shining water that moves in the streams and rivers is not just water, but the blood of our ancestors. If we sell you our land, you must remember that it is sacred. Each ghostly reflection in the clear water of the lakes tells of events and memories in the life of my people. The water's murmur is the voice of my father's father. The rivers are our brothers. They quench our thirst. They carry our canoes and feed our children. So you must give to the rivers the kindness you would give any brother ... This we know: The Earth does not belong to man, man belongs to Earth." Standing at Dupath Well, a century later and an ocean away, Chief Seattle's words seem to me to be as vital as ever. I am reminded here at this ancient sacred site that I too had ancestors who did not consider themselves greater than the land on which they lived; who did not take good, pure water for granted; who knew man belonged to Earth.

An old English folklorist told me once that nature spirits would live in a well, a spring,



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a lake, or a grove of trees only so long as they were remembered and addressed respectfully. If the spirits were neglected, they'd leave the place; the land would feel soul-less and dead henceforth. Remembering this, I dropped a pin into the brown water of Dupath Well. The well-house stands near the workyard of a farm; I could hear the traffic of the roads nearby; and yet somehow the spot still seemed quite peaceful, timeless, magical ... and very much alive. I felt a little foolish saying "Thank you" right out loud—and I couldn't even tell you now who exactly I thought I was addressing there: a nature spirit, a well faery, a Celtic goddess, or the Earth itself.

And yet, as we turned to go, I'd swear that someone was listening.

Book recommendations for further reading: the Quiller Couch and Broadhurst books mentioned above, as well as *Sacred Waters: Holy Wells and Water Lore in Britain and Ireland* by Janet and Colin Bord. Frazer's *Golden Bough* and the works of Joseph Campbell and Mircea Eliades are good reference sources for mythological topics. And I highly recommend *The Spell of the Sensuous* by David Abram for a fascinating look at animism, language and ecology. ♀

EDITORIAL

Continued from page 6

not trust him. She could not trust him. But she would never say so.

"More tea, Mr. Disraeli?"

Disraeli smiled an alarmingly brilliant smile, and nodded. His lips moved but no words — no English words — could be heard. But across the rosewood table the queen slowly melted like butter on a hot skillet. A few more cabalistic phrases and she was reformed into a toad.

"Yes, please, Ma'am," Disraeli answered. The toad, wearing a single crown jewel in her head, poured the tea. "Ribbet" she said clearly.

"I agree, Ma'am," said Disraeli. "I entirely agree." With a single word he turned her back. Such small distractions amused him on these state visits. He could not say as much for the queen.

There are lots of other voices to choose from. But one needs to suit the barbarian to the sword, as it were. Still, whatever voice an author chooses to use, it will never in the end be good enough. Not for what she wants to say. It will only be good enough up to a point, only approximate what the author is trying to say.

Pity us poor authors. Words are all we have to work with. Flaubert said it well: "Human language is a cracked kettle on which we beat out tunes for bears to dance to when all the while we want to move the stars to pity." But sometimes we make music despite ourselves.

Jane Yolen

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*In a universe of good and evil, sin and redemption,
Heaven and Hell, a man cannot do anything by halves.*

DROWNED LOVE

BY C.W. JOHNSON
Illustration by Alan Pollack

♦♦ **S**HE IS DEAD, SHE IS DEAD, SHE IS DEAD," SINGS THE MASTER'S SON. I stiffen as he sings to himself over the crash of the waves against the ship. He is a half-idiot. I tell myself to push down my red rage; though a grown man like myself he has only a child's mind and should be forgiven. No doubt he overheard his father make some savage slur about Lydia and me and repeats it carelessly, not understanding the sharp pain the words bring.

"Pretty Marie, she lost her head, she is dead, she is dead," the Master's son continues, and the tension falls from me like the cut strings of a marionette. He is singing about the revolt in France; it is one of his child-like nonsense songs.

We are standing on the quarterdeck. As if to compensate for the smallness of his mind, the Master's son is a large man, nearly twice as broad as I. He could crush me as easily as look at me. Yet he has never hurt anyone. As gentle as a mother, he cradles the tiller in his huge hands — navigation is the one gift of his simple mind. He often sings to himself as he steers his father's tiny caravel.

Despite the song's innocence, my stomach is queasy from the words and I turn away, leaning out into the sea breeze. The sun sinks to the horizon, sheeting the ocean with copper. Although the sky above is open and blue, I see on the dark water a frigate in a storm. Lightning dances in the rigging, the passengers scream for God's

mercy. I smell the frigate captain's fear as he sees the foaming water that means a shoal. Imagining this, my own heart beats faster and sweat drips down my face. His voice tearing, the captain orders the ship about, but too much, the deck tilts beneath his feet....

"A ship!" Mario cries from the foredeck.

I leap forward, leaving the Master's son to his songs. At the foredeck I crouch beside the boys Mario and Tomas. We lean over the railing to peer down at a shadow in the depths. For a moment we are silent amid the creak of the deck, the rush of the wind, and the crash of the waves. That dark stain beneath the sea could be a ship. It could be the *Alma*. I clap Mario on the shoulder. He and Tomas are like sons to me, having no sons that lived, only daughters.

The Master is below decks, singing to his bottle as his son sings to the ocean. So with a word to Mario and Tomas, and with some shouts at the sullen crewmen, I order the caravel brought around.

As they work, I check the bell once again. The Master dreams of salvaging gold and cannons. I dream of salvaging the truth of Lydia's fate.

We grease up Mario to keep the chill off, tie weights and a rope to him. He leaps into the water and sinks down to see if the shadow is a ship.

After a count to 20, we haul up on the rope until Mario bursts to the surface, gasping. "Oh!" he cries out, "pull me up!"

"A ship?" I ask. But he flails in the water and calls to be pulled on deck. We do so and he climbs aboard, water streaming from his body. I demand of him harshly, "A ship?"

He nods and coughs. "I saw the mast and the tattered sails. Then something cold and slick gripped my ankle" He shivers from cold and fear.

"Seaweed," I tell him, but he shakes his head.

We cast anchor — the water is seven fathoms deep — and I go below to knock on the Master's cabin door. After a long pause, his crumpled voice comes from behind the closed door, telling me we will begin salvage in the morning.

By the last rays of the sun we sup, eating bread and cheese, jerky, and strong wine. I never care for the looks of the rest of the crew, so I eat with Mario and Tomas. The lead sheath of the bell gleams a dull orange in the sunset; above it the stars wax bright. I point out the constellations that shine like jewels finer than the crown of the king of Spain, and tell the boys stories of old, that Father Schonenheim told me. When the sky is black and moonless we climb into our hammocks below decks.

In the cramped darkness I am thinking about Lydia, softly swinging in my hammock and drifting off to sleep, when suddenly a knife cuts through the haze and jolts me awake: Mario calling out to us. Tomas and I dash to the deck.

Mario huddles in the center of the deck but points to the edge. "I came up to piss," he says, "and looked in the water... "

I lean over the railing. At first, I see nothing but black water. But then, it almost seems a faint bluish glow comes from deep beneath the surface. But I am not certain.

"Just the stars reflecting in the water," I say, not believing it. "Go to sleep. There'll be much more light, light surrounding us and filling us in the morning. Sleep, boy." The three of us clamber down below.

It takes a long time to fall asleep.

FOR TWO AND A HALF DAYS WE HAVE BEEN SEARCHING for the wreck of the merchant frigate *Alma*. According to the lone survivor of the *Alma*, a cabin boy named Manuel, the ship had not foundered, but a shoal had been spotted in a storm, the captain had heeled the ship around too fast, and it had capsized and sunk. All crew and passengers were presumed lost.

This piece of coast, which we call the Sea of Fog, eats ships like the Scylla and Charbydis of the old Greek stories that Father Schonenheim likes to recount. For years I have worked for the Master, gleaning bits of brass and silver and gold from wrecks shattered on hidden shoals. We know this coast as intimately as the streets of Gijon. From Manuel's story we knew to look not on a shoal but near one.

The work has been tedious and exhausting. The rough rope cut into our hands as we hauled up first Tomas, then Mario, the salt water burning the wounds. After a while Mario replaced Tomas and Tomas shivered in the sun. We passed several old wrecks we knew and had salvaged years ago. One was the *Amor*. Another was the *Vida* from Lisbon. It, too, sank during a furious lightning storm. I cannot help but think of the story that Manuel, the *Alma*'s cabin boy, first told when he was found, delirious with fever and exposure. He told of blue lights in the mast and rigging and of screaming voices making the crew go mad. Later, when the fever had passed, he denied this story or ever telling it, even though there were many witnesses to his ravings. He denied it with a coolness unusual for boys his age. This fueled rumors that witch-

craft had been responsible for the wreck.

Some rumors say the witch was paid by my wife, Theresa, to kill my mistress, Lydia.

Where Theresa found the money, the rumors do not say. Father Schonenheim, too, was dubious about this theory. "No doubt the devil works many evil deeds through his legions of witches and sorcerers," he told me. "But ordinary men have plenty of evil by themselves, without the aid of the devil, to create much of the world's misery."

His words cut me deep and guilt ran through me like a river. Perhaps, if I had done what I had promised Lydia, if I had left Theresa for her, if I had not hesitated and stalled, she wouldn't have fled Gijon in tears and she would not now be lying in a watery grave under the sea.

Burdened by grief I confessed my sin to Father Schonenheim. He assigned me *pater nosters* and *ave marias* to say in penance, and daily prayer in church. "But Father," I asked, straining to keep my voice from breaking, "is it wrong to feel grief for her death, even though she is not my proper wife?"

Father Schonenheim reflected for a moment in the confessional booth. The mention of Lydia made Father Schonenheim uneasy. He blamed himself in part, for to answer a question of mine he had sent me to her to borrow a book. "While your love was wrong," he said slowly in his heavy accent, "your carnal love that is, it is always right to love a fellow human through the eyes of God, and it is always right to grieve the loss of life." He thought for a moment and added, "But be sure of the purity of your motives. In Hell, unrepentant adulterers take on monstrous forms, half human and half animal, because they lived a double life torn between more than one love, and because they gave in to their animal nature." I crossed myself fervently.

But in the dark I miss her still.

THE DAWN SLIPS THROUGH CRACKS IN THE CEILING and wakes me. Tomas and Mario grumble as I heave them out of their hammocks, but soon we are all on deck, silently gnawing some bread. This morning the Sea of Fog is free from mist. A chill air comes off the water as the caravel rocks quietly in the ocean swells.

The Master stands on the deck and squints in the bright morning light. "Hoist the bell," he says.

The boys unleash the bell, which is made of oak and sheathed in lead, as I walk around and rap its sides. Tomas drags ballast to the port side of the ship; I will dive on the starboard. Mario climbs the caravel's short mast and checks the lanyards and the block and tackle. He is about to come down when he cries out, "Look! Look! A mermaid! I see it! Look!"

Tomas swears impatiently but we all go to the stern. A dark figure floats on the water near some rocks. Suddenly the Master laughs aloud.

Mario shinies down from the mast. "Do you see her? Do you?" he points to the figure.

"That's no mermaid," the Master tells him, "but only a sea-cow. Perhaps from a distance it seems alluring, boy, but up close I assure you they are one of God's ugliest creatures."

Tomas says snidely, "Perhaps soon Mario will see his mermaids herding the sea-cows off to market; and perhaps a mer-matador fighting a sea-bull, eh?" Mario turns his head away.

"Enough of this nonsense," the Master says.

He nods to his son, who without a word heaves on the crank. Wood creaks and ropes groan. As the bell lifts slowly into the air, Mario and Tomas and I push it so it swings out over the waves. The caravel lists to starboard as we attach the stone weights to the bell. Tomas blocks the crank for the Master's son, and the boys shift heavy stones to the port side.

As they move the ballast stones I strip and shiver in the cold morning air, slap my flesh, and grease my skin with dogfish oil. It stinks but will help keep me warm. For additional warmth the Master uncorks his bottle of rum and hands it to me; I take a few fiery swigs.

The flame courses down my throat and into my belly.

The Master watches me closely as I drink his rum. Once he had been strong and muscular like his son. Now he is fat and his eyes are surrounded by wrinkles and his nose red with burst vessels and his gray beard grows in uneven patches. All he has is his son and this caravel and the commission of the King of Spain, our august Charles IV, to salvage wrecks on this treacherous coast. I do not drink too much.

At the Master's signal, the crank is unblocked and the bell is lowered into the water. I watch it carefully to make sure it cups as much air as possible. The stone weights drag it down and it sinks into the greenish depths and soon is out of sight. Mario and I fling weighted ropes over the side and they snake into the deep. When I judge the bell is deep enough, I call out to stop. The Master's son holds the crank while Tomas blocks the gear again. I grab a heavy stone with one hand, put the other hand to cover my mouth and nose, and leap into the sea.

The cold shocks me as it does every time. The water rushes by as I sink. Soon the light of the surface is dim above my head, and I see below me the bell, which is about a fathom above the muddy bottom of the sea. I drop the stone and swim into the mouth of the bell; as I do I see, not far away, the dark hulk of a wrecked ship.

I burst up into the pocket of air captured in the bell. Already I hurt from the cold; strangely enough, the Master obtained this bell from a Swedish salvager, who worked in far colder waters than this. There is no light inside the bell, and the water rises two-thirds of the way up the bell. I catch a few shallow breaths, then one deep breath and turn and swim out.

The wreck is not far, bathed in greenish light streaming from above. A few kicks and strokes skimming across the ocean ooze and I am there. The wreck lies on its port side, although its broken masts point upward, with a few tatters of sails still attached. It is the right size for the *Alma* but I am not yet sure. Swimming along the splintered and cracked foredeck, I scatter fish that live among the blackened planks; then I turn round and swim back to the bell for more air.

The next excursion I swim wide of the ship and am rewarded: I find, sticking in the muck, a cannon, discolored and barnacled but in one piece. This is a piece of good luck: such finely made brass cannons are not common and by itself will make this expedition pay. After another trip to the bell I bring one of the dangling weighted ropes and tie it to the cannon. My fingers are numb and barely work. A final trip finds all is secure.

Another nip at the air in the bell, like the Master at his rum, and then I swim out once more, gliding over the quarterdeck and poopdeck, and by the grace of God I find, on the stern, a name carved: *Alma*. That name, crusted with slime, knocks against my soul.

Back at the bell I tug on the rope that signals the caravel above. Soon the bell, with me inside, begins rising to the surface. I cling to the inside of the bell, like a drowned church-bat, listening to the hollow sound of my breath and the water sloshing against the sides. And my heart clangs against the sides of my chest. Lydia is dead. I know it now. Her sweet body lies here. God save her soul.

And mine.

THE BELL HOLDS PERHAPS A HALF-AN-HOUR'S worth of breath, no more. I know this because I have, at Father Schonenheim's suggestion, burnt a candle in the submerged bell. He told me of the researches of Priestly, an English cleric (a heretical Anglican, it is true, but at least better than the dammed Calvinists), who showed that the flame of life and the flame of a candle both are extinguished when cut off for long from the breath of God.

Listening to the hollow sound of my breath and the water sloshing against the sides, I think of Father Schonenheim. Even for a priest he seems exceptionally learned. He reads Greek and Hebrew and English and French in addition to Latin and Spanish and his own native tongue. I have heard some suggest that he was sent to our small and distant city to humble his love of knowledge. But no

matter that. Weekly he receives letters from his sister Dagmar, who keeps him abreast of worldly news and sends interesting books for him to devour. One might easily think he loves ideas as much as he loves God.

And me? When I was small I loved books, too, although my father tore them out of my hands. Then I loved Theresa and pledged myself to her. Oh, Theresa: tall, ethereal beauty, proud granddaughter of the mayor of Gijon. She defied her family for me and accepted her disinheritance, not knowing that after a few years of living poor-but-happy the romance wears off and you simply live poor. Submerged in the diving bell of poverty, the bright candle of our love burned out long ago, and we resigned ourselves to duty and to scavenging a life off the bottom of the ocean.

Then Lydia came into my life, bringing a book. Bringing joy and hope, love and light for a few years.

In the dark in the bell my face is wet and salty. But that is from the ocean. When the news of the wreck of the *Alma* came it was not me, but Theresa who cried. She sat in the kitchen, her face in her hands, weeping. Our eldest daughter tried to console her. "What's the matter, Mama?" Theresa never said. It discomfited me to see her cry. It reminded me of my mother weeping over my father's exploits and infidelities.

I am not like my father. He was a stupid man who slept with many women to puff himself up like a rooster and then made sly insults about them behind their backs. He cared nothing for them. I loved Lydia. But I have pledged myself to Theresa and could not bring myself to leave her. This broke Lydia's heart—I had already broken Theresa's—and she bought passage on the next ship out of Gijon.

My heart went cold and empty at the news of the shipwreck. Even if I did not weep and Theresa did.

In the end I have betrayed them both.

I SIT IN THE SUN, SHIVERING, WARMING UP, AS TWO pock-faced crewmen heave on the ropes and haul up the cannon. At last it rises from the water, dripping and glinting in the sun, parts of it discolored from corrosion and sea life. The Master taps at it and finally gives a satisfied grunt.

I tell him the exact position of the wreck, and when I am warm again we weigh the anchors and drift slightly north, to directly over the ship. The Master's son leans over the edge, staring down, mesmerized by the waves of the sea and the lure of its treasures. Then, by order of his father, he lowers the bell into the depths again.

I slap on more dogfish oil and take another swig of rum. Crossing myself, I stand on the edge and leap. Once again I sink through the depths and the light from the surface dims and nearly fades away.

I once had an idea why I loved swimming underwater so much, and I told it to Father Schonenheim. You see, there is the wonderful freedom of floating free. When I soar through the water like the angels on high, I imagine it must be what Heaven is like. I told Father Schonenheim this, and he nodded vigorously. "We are amphibious, yes," he said, with a rare smile, "in a spiritual sense: we have souls, and so inhabit eternity, but wear flesh and so also inhabit time. We are torn between the temptations of the latter and the higher calling of the former."

The bell is a fathom above the crumpled, tilted quarterdeck of the *Alma*. I drop the ballast rock, swim into the bell and gulp air. The water is so cold. I must work fast.

I take a deep breath and sink down to the wreck. There is a gaping hole in the deck through which I swim. The captain's quarters are likely to be in the stern; there should be the cache of gold.

The black interior is occasionally lit by sheets of light that squeeze through cracks in the shattered frame of the ship; otherwise I guide myself along walls slimy with sea-mold. The captain's cabin should be this way, but I cannot find it.

In this corridor it is dark. I see nothing. But I must not panic. Panic is the knife that will kill me.

Turning around, I see a faint light outlining a door. It must be a way out. Pushing off a wall I swim through it.

This room must have been the galley, I realize, for there is a long



COVER: Spanish artist Luis Royo's heroic warrior, "Raven." ABOVE: Ian Miller's Gothic illustration for J.R.R. Tolkien's fantasy classic, *Lord of the Rings*. See story beginning page 84.

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They say if you remember the '60s, you weren't really there. Well maybe you weren't.

narrow table, still set with plates and silver and candlesticks. With a shudder I realize the moment of the wreck must have been when they were dining, for there are black corpses surrounding the table, caught by death in the moment of feasting. I shudder.

The cold is very sharp. Something is wrong: I have never before seen a corpse in a shipwreck before, for the sea devours her victims very quickly. Before this thought is fully formed I see the candles are still lit. They give off a bluish glow. And in the flickering light — it must be a trick of the light — I see the arm of a corpse reach forward and lift a cup. And another cuts at his plate with silver. And they turn to me, with grinning black skulls —

Holy Mary Mother of God —

My chest is bursting for want of air, the candle of my life is burning out, and I turn and flee from the room back into the black corridor and my pulse pounds in my ears and somehow I find my way out into the open water above the deck of the ship, the tatters of the sails billowing as if still in the wind. The surface is too far above, though I ache to go there and quit the cold and the horror of this place, and so I desperately swim up into the bell.

My vision is fading even as I pull myself into the dark chamber and when my head breaks into the air I suck in huge breaths and accidentally breathe in some water and I cough and choke and my lungs burn. It is all I can do to hang on and not sink back down into the water and drown. Eventually I get enough air and my heart slows. I hear only the echo of my breathing and the soft slap-slap of water inside the bell.

The space inside the bell is very small. I put my hands against the lead sheathing. It is very small here.

But I cannot let my fear — or my imagination, brought on from being in the cold too long — conquer me. The light was dim inside the wreck. It was a trick of twisting shadows. I shall go back and find the chest of gold.

So I fill my lungs again and turn up my heels and push hard. I pull myself over the railing of the ship to its side, where it is smashed against the bottom, providing an easy entrance to it. This time I quickly find the captain's quarters. The door is open. I don't have much time to search, which I must do mostly by touch; but just as I am about to leave I yank open a cabinet door. Hard coins rain down on me: I feel rather than see them and grab a handful before swimming out of the wreck.

As I come out I see a shadowy shape and my heart jumps. It might be a shark. But I don't see it again, so I open my clenched fist. The coins gleam shiny and yellow-green. I smile to myself, then glide up to the bell. This is no dream.

The bell is full of stale air and more cramped than ever. One last approach, I tell myself — then to the surface.

For a moment I hover over the deck of the ship, watching for the shark. But I see only the swimming shadowy shape of the great bulk of the ship. The weight of the water and the cold presses down on me and I long for the surface, to breathe the open air, to smell the salt breeze and to feel the sun on my cheek and my chest, to warm my numb body. My hands are numb and my muscles cramped. My mind is numb. My heart is numb. My vision fading. *Pater noster ...*

I swim forward and suddenly I see the shark immediately before me. My heart beats wildly. But it is not a shark, but a human corpse. A woman — it is *Lydia's* corpse. Oh God. Oh Father Son and Ghost. Holy Mary ... The corpse floats toward me and raises its arms to me and she is not dead after all. Her brown tresses float around her and her skin is sleek and brown, from her beautiful round face down to her shoulders and breasts and her hips and she has no legs but the tail of a seal or a sea-cow — *she is a mermaid.*

She raises her hands to touch my face and I push her away, feeling the soft slick seal-fur of her skin, and desperately, in a panic, I back-pedal in the water, push off a broken plank in the deck and swim up for the bell, knowing she is right behind me. I swim inside until my hand crashes against the lead.

Chilled to the bone and sucking in air desperately, I pray to Father Son and Ghost to save me and to Mary and all the saints. My lungs

burn as I gasp the stale air. I reach down to the rope that will signal them to raise the bell. Only when I pull on it, it is slack in my hand. I pull and pull and find the end of it, cut by the feel of it.

It is dark inside the bell and still I think I see a faint light. I must be dreaming as the last bits of God's breath sputter out; I must swim to the surface. And yet in the light I see the water gleam inside the bell. And I see sticks rise out of the water. Black sticks.

With growing horror I realize they are not sticks but bones. Skeletal hands. The hands of the dead of the ship gather around me and clutch at me and their skulls come dripping out of the water yammering at me. The bell is full of their bones. And I think, They hate me, like the ones who hated my father and hated me for my father's sake and would not hire me; they are the ones who hated my stupid father — my father who feared the water and who in his time of desperation sought eternal release beneath the waves.

"I am not like my father!" I scream, then dive back into the water, pushing aside the skeletons, even as the fingers grasp my still-solid flesh. I pull myself under the lip of the bell into the open water. The ship is still before me, its sails billowing in an underwater wind... The thought comes to me: I was wrong, what I told Father Schonenheim; the ocean is not like Heaven, it is like Hell, the cold of the distance between you and your fellow man, the horrible weight of mortal sin pressing down upon you and drowning you...

And Lydia floats there, awaiting me, with that amused smile on her lips that she always has. She spreads her palms, as if to welcome me, to encourage me to stay. To stay and drown with her.

Then she reaches for me. Her fingers are strong. She puts her lips to mine and kisses me. *You don't forget, do you?* her kiss says to me. *How could you believe our love is dead?*

For a moment I remember a kiss on a hilltop with the town below us, at night with the rain coming down in sheets outside, in bed with her skin warm against mine; and her sweet laughter.

I shove her away and kick for the surface. I must reach the surface, we must sail away from this evil place and never return. I swim upward toward the light, which grows stronger. My lungs are bursting, longing for air.

Something yanks at my ankle. *Lydia*, I think. *Lydia*, I cry out: I open my mouth and water floods in and I can't help it, I inhale and I choke on the brine, still too deep to reach the surface —

— and for a moment I hang there, curled up in a ball, suspended over the wreck between the ooze of the bottom and the light of the surface and I see the truth of what Father Schonenheim had taught: We are creatures of the sea but we live on land out of her love and her life; it comes to me in a shock, a bright light and pain filling my chest and my head: I am amphibious living half in life and half out, half in love and half out, half out of the world, half out of my mind, out of my heart. Oh sweet Lydia. I had so much love for you but I let it drown in the sea of hesitation and doubt, and you in the Sea of Fog... The pain wraps itself around my chest and slowly begins to squeeze out the candle of my life. The light is growing—

The pain sharpens, then my head clears and I find myself swimming upward as the surface and safety approaches. I can see the keel of the caravel now, gently rocking in the waves. The surface is near.

With a final burst of effort I reach upward and break the surface. I turn toward the boat. All the crew is above deck, the two pock-faced men in the crow's nest, Tomas and Mario leaning over the railing staring down into the water. Suddenly they look at me. I raise my hand and wave to them. Mario gives a great shout of fright and recoils from the railing. Tomas stares at me, as if in disbelief.

Something is wrong: I open my mouth but the air is thin. I cannot breathe. And as the Master comes forward and Mario points me out to him, I see my hand, my arm. Sleek and brown and covered with fur like a seal.

The Master crosses himself. Beside him stands his son, who is singing words I no longer can understand. But I know what they must be: *He is dead, he is dead, he is dead.*

And I sink back down into the arms of the sea; into the embrace of my beloved Lydia. ♣

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And Horses S are born with Eagles Wings

"Now here," my sister said, "is the *pièce de résistance*."

MARLY SET ASIDE HER ART CASE and placed a department store shopping bag on my kitchen counter with a dramatic flourish. She pulled out a bake of apples and a small tissue-wrapped package. "Organic art," Marly said. "Our very first for the gallery. In four dimensions." I watched her unwrap the tissue and lay out neat piles of popsicle sticks, crudely carved to resemble arms and legs. "Who is the artist?" I asked as she whirled toward my knife rack. She brandished a carving knife. "Q'meh," she proclaimed, her thin brows soaring, then paused, waiting for a reaction.

"I'm supposed to know this name?"

"Oh, Barb." Marly reached for an apple and sliced it neatly in half. "Don't you ever read the material I leave for you?"

Upstairs, unbidden, my daughter began her piano warmups, and unconsciously Marly picked up the rhythm as she sliced apple after apple.

"I'm sorry," I said, when it was clear she wouldn't speak until I

had apologized. "I do save it, but I get caught up dealing with the books, and the bookkeeping, and parent chores."

Marly carefully trimmed away an apple core. "Organic art is Q'meh's specialty — and I bought this one because it's participational as well. Genius! The woman is a genius, and this in our front window is going to bring people in."

"People with checkbooks, I hope," I said. "Speaking of filthy lucre, what do we owe this genius?"

Marly sniffed. "You can be mercenary *after* you experience synergy."

Her fingers delved among the little wooden arms and legs, again in rhythm with Elizabeth's labored arpeggios. My attention was drawn upward by the unaccustomed tempo of Elizabeth's playing; was it anger, or eagerness? Four tonal steps later I looked down at an apple-half with arms stuck on the high curves at each side of the top. Halfway down on either side were little legs, giving the apple a spread-eagled look.

"That is obscene," I said.

Marly's dark eyes narrowed into a glare. "Rape is obscene. Murder. Environmental destruction. This represents *woman*. Female symbolism is *beautiful*."

I touched an apple-woman. "Is this how we are supposed to see ourselves — a vagina with arms and legs? These things don't even have heads!"

"That is how men see us," she said briskly, plunging her hand back into the bag. This time she pulled forth a celery stalk, its foliage close-trimmed, and set it in a little carved stand so it

stood upright at a suggestive angle.

"Will we have to cough up more money when this food art rots?" I asked.

"We paid for the rights, of course. Don't you see it, Barbra?" Touching celery, then apple, and again celery and apple, she said, "Male sex, female sex, the Tree of Knowledge — the forbidden fruit — Adam, Eve. They wither, representing the loss of innocence." She smiled. "Genius."

Upstairs, Elizabeth faltered in B flat. There was a discordant clangor, as if a seven-year-old fist had crashed down on the keys, then the arpeggios finished in an aggressively marked rhythm.

Marly's smile faded. "You're still forcing Lizzie to play that piano?"

"I'm not forcing her," I said, working to keep my own impatience from showing. "She asked to learn."

"Only because *you* love to play. But *she* doesn't enjoy it — she told me herself last time I came up here."

"That's because she found out that it takes work to learn. The piano teacher said it's a common pattern. I remember hating it at first, but Gram made me keep at it."

"Gram made us do a lot of stupid things."

"I told Elizabeth she can quit on her birthday if she still doesn't like it."

Marly shrugged, fussing with the last of her circle of apple-women. As she finished, she cocked her head. "Well, I like what she's playing now."

Through the false notes and uncertain tempo of an inexperienced player's sight-reading came phrases of melody, a skipping, laughing harmonic line that evoked summer gardens and dancing children. Elizabeth came to the end of the piece and launched straight into it again.

"She seems to like it as well," I said.

Marly nodded, but her focus was back on her artwork. Flinging her hands wide, she said, "Do you see it? The Adam and Eve shtick, the sultan and his harem, a brilliant indictment —"

Her voice dropped into a stagey accent. "of the typical male attitude toward women in our civilization?"

"I see fruit halves circling a celery stalk. Hole in one. Or is that one in hole?"

"Oh, Barb." Marly let a snicker escape, and then, as if mad at herself, swept the food into her bag. "How can someone so literal have such a dirty mind?" She whirled around. "I'm taking these downstairs to set them up. *You* can cut a check." Slamming a contract onto the counter, she grabbed her stuff and marched to the door.

I looked down at the contract, but the words flickered before my eyes. The emerging melody — Elizabeth's fourth repetition — was so compelling that the hesitations and false notes made my fingers ache to play it right.

Dropping the contract onto the counter, I ran upstairs. Elizabeth was hunched forward over the piano keys, her whole body stiff with the intensity of her concentration. She wasn't alone. All three of our animals were in the room with her, a rarity. The dog lay on the carpet, head on paws. Both cats perched, like fuzzy meatloaves, one on each arm of the recliner.

To my surprise, Elizabeth did not use my entrance as an excuse to quit. She played on, laboriously at times, impatiently backtracking to repeat measures. When she reached the end, she lifted her hands and turned on the bench to grin at me.

"That's a pretty piece," I said. "I don't remember the piano teacher playing it for you."

"That's 'cause the music lady gave it to me."

"Music teacher? At school?"

"Music lady," Elizabeth corrected, her wide brown eyes intent.

I sat down on the piano bench beside her. "May I play it?" She nodded vigorously, her black curls bouncing on her skinny shoulders.

The music was handwritten on standard composition paper, obviously photocopied many times. Slanted italics at the top stated "Animal Dance." There was no composer name, no copyright.

I played it through once, then again, with careful attention to

tempo and phrasing. It was a lovely piece of music, evoking images of faerie folk dancing about the piano. Elizabeth watched my hands, her legs swinging to the skipping beat.

"Play it again," she said when I was done.

I did. She said, "Oh, Mom, that was good. It was almost as good as the music lady."

I was silent, hiding the amalgam of irritation and pleasure this response gave me. The irritation I dismissed as mere jealousy. Obviously a professional would play better, and I held onto the pleasure, glad that my daughter exhibited signs of discrimination.

"One more time," she said. "Please? Then I want to try again."

So I played it a fourth time, then stood up. "Maybe your piano teacher will let you play it for the next recital."

"Oh, the music lady said she would give me more if I learn this one. And *all* her songs are pretty ones." She waved her hands, calling to mind a vivid memory of Marly at her age.

"Well. Go for it," I said, crossing the room to the door. Elizabeth was playing again, this time with more assurance. I looked back, and laughed when I saw the two cats and the dog lined up behind the piano bench, just like a little audience, listening.

"I think they want you to feed them, Elizabeth. When you're done with practice?"

"Okay, Mom." She went right on playing.

M

y father used to maintain that Blake Edwards' *Breakfast at Tiffany's* was the pinnacle of sophistication. When Marly and I finally saw the film, Dad's life began to make some kind of sense to us. I wondered if his first wife, whom he divorced when they both turned middle-aged, had been like George Peppard's girlfriend, and our mother — who was eighteen when he met her — was supposed to be Holly Golightly. At any rate, all Dad had left after these episodes was the bookstore — and us, because not long after Marly was born our mother left to follow a guru. About the time Marly was learning to walk, the news came that our mother had succumbed to some kind of stomach parasite in a little village in India, and had been hastily buried there. Gram moved in with us, and until she died did her best to make young ladies of Marly and me. For the next ten years we watched Dad puttering around the high stacks of books as emphysema slowly choked the life out of him.

Our inheritance was this big barn of a building, the bottom floor of which was an enormous store of old books whose sales amounted to a steady trickle through the summer months. It was Marly's idea to turn a portion of the store into an art gallery. She had no interest in the walls and towers of old books. Those were my citadel. I read them, loved them, dusted and shelved them, catalogued them, went to the estate and library sales to look for more.

With a minimum of paint and rugs and rearrangement, Marly cleared a space in the front of the store. Somehow there was light, and air, and space. More people did come in, but as our income increased, so did our expenses, leaving us still living precariously.

"Okay," I said the next day. "Maybe you're right about a reception." As Marly opened her mouth, I added, "But no caterers. We can't afford it, even if by some miracle we should sell your fruit art."

"But we can't be cheap-ass," Marly said, flinging her hands up. "It'll make the art look cheap. Who owes us? Or do we owe everybody?"

I thought. Our end of town had never been fashionable, and was now on the borderland of dangerous, but a lot of people, mostly artists, were trying to hang on. A complicated webwork of barter had been formed, particularly among the women, as one method of survival.

"Spring," I said. "If she doesn't have to do any parties —"

"Yes, Spring!" Marly whirled around, hands on hips. "Then all we'll have to pay for will be groceries. Of course this means no meat dishes —"

"Vegan is now hip," I said. "And you know it'll taste great."

"Can we use Spring's kid and Lizzie as waitpersons?" Marly asked.

I hesitated, not wanting to say how uncomfortable I felt about exposing my daughter to adult discussions of Marly's participational art. "Second graders?"

"Too young. Right." Marly whirled around again, then struck another pose. She's always insisted that her indifferent luck in landing acting jobs was because she'd been born with a swan soul in a duck body. "How about Mark? We owe him or he owe us?"

It was my job, as the stationary one, to monitor the pendulum of obligations. "We're even," I said. "But Cornell really wants that first edition Dornford Yates ..."

After an hour of energetic phone work, Marly had her reception put together. Spring arrived, tired from work, to pick up her daughter Shay, and Marly pulled her into the gallery. While the two discussed the grocery list I went upstairs to get Shay.

The familiar lilting melody of "Animal Dance," now played with confidence, brought me smiling to the attic. In the skylight's slanting golden rays Elizabeth perched intently at the piano while Shay, swathed extravagantly in Gran's fringed brocade piano cover, scudded about the room as lightly as a bird. The animals sat watching.

When the song ended I said, "Shay, your mother is here."

The girls traded glances, then Shay laid the piano cover carefully in its place and started toward me, her blue eyes distracted.

"That was a pretty dance," I said.

"I'm learning from a girl at school," she said in her soft voice. "The music lady said I *have* to dance —" She stopped suddenly.

I turned, saw Spring coming up the steps, big and breezy, her butch-cut hair recently dyed a bright platinum. "Hey, babe," she said, reaching a freckled hand to ruffle her daughter's hair. "I told you, dance if you want. But no lessons."

Shay pushed past and ran downstairs, Elizabeth on her heels.

We followed more slowly. "She's got talent," I said, thinking of those airily arched wrists, the graceful cant of head. "A lot."

"I know," Spring said with a grimace. "But while we're living with my mother we play by her rules. And number one hundred forty-seven is: Ballet exploits women's bodies. Damn. If some helpful teacher is telling her to assert herself —"

"Lizzie says the 'music lady' is not a teacher."

"Good. It'll be a lot easier to tell some other parent to butt out if I have to." She laughed as we caught up with the girls. "C'mon, kiddo, into the car."

"What was that about?" Marly asked, coming to the stairway.

I knew Marly would take up Shay's cause, but I also knew that Judyth Dorisdottir — which was Spring's mother's newest name — would be one of the loudest supporters of Marly's apple and celery art, so I said only, "Parent vs. teacher."

"God." Marly rolled her eyes.

"**T**his is me and you!"
I shook my head. "It's my mother and me, when I was a year or two younger than you are now."
Elizabeth frowned down at the picture, then up at me. "She looks like you. Except her hair is weird. So's her dress. Is she a hippie?"

"People wore their hair that way in those days, and they dressed that way," I said, avoiding the question.

"Was she nice?"

My conscious memories of my mother are brief, but I know there's more buried because I still can't listen to the Moody Blues, and once when I walked into a store and smelled sandalwood incense, I stopped as if I had hit an invisible wall, jolted by incomprehensible emotions.

"She laughed a lot," I said. "And her favorite food was pizza."

"Pizza! Like Aunt Marly!"

"Just like Aunt Marly. Now, let's put the photo album away."

Elizabeth snuggled down into her bed; from below came a sudden gust of adult laughter, and the clink of silver and glassware. "I'll

I played it through once, then again, with careful attention to tempo and phrasing. It was a lovely piece of music, evoking images of faerie folk dancing about the piano.

have to go downstairs to Auntie Marly's party," I said. "She'll need my help. Shall we have a chapter first?"

"I don't want *Charlotte's Web* tonight," Elizabeth murmured, plucking at her bedspread. "It's too noisy down there."

"Shall I drown them out with a little music?"

"Okay."

I went into the other room and played all her old favorites — "The Ash Grove" and some Respighi — and finished up with her "Animal Dance." When I finished, the tension had smoothed from her face, and her eyelids looked heavy enough for sleep.

"Mom," she said as I kissed her, "I'm going to be a music lady."

"Sounds good," I said, as I always do whenever she talks about a possible career. "Remember, I'm right downstairs if you need me."

The smells of perfume, food, wine met me halfway up the stairwell. Noise resolved into individual voices as I walked into the close-packed store. Most of the people seemed to be Marly's theatre crowd, who would show up to anything, eat a lot, laugh more, and not buy so much as a giftcard — they had even less money than Marly did. Nodding to those I recognized and smiling at those I didn't, I made my way to Marly, who was rummaging, drink in hand, through my tapes. "Oh there you are," she exclaimed. "I heard the piano. Kid suddenly need a lesson right in the middle of the party?"

"Lizzie's not used to noise," I reminded her. "Had to calm her down. She's decided on a new career — music lady."

Marly brightened. She enthuses over Elizabeth's leanings toward the arts, and ignores the occasional foray into what our guardians used to call the more practical fields. "Great! You can tell her teacher — he's right behind you. But first, what for atmosphere?" She held out several CDs.

"Harry Partch."

"Bitch." She laughed, dropped Philip Glass into the machine, and whirled into the thickest crowd, none of whom seemed to hear a note of the music.

I replaced the Glass CD with Gesualdo, turning to see if it changed the atmosphere any.

"Hi." I barely heard the male voice over two women trilling show-tunes in unlikely accents. "Ms. Meredith?"

I looked up, saw a familiar pair of glasses, a balding blond head, and a square face which quickly resolved into Elizabeth's second grade teacher. He looked out of place; his stiff smile confirmed it.

"Mr. Bartholomew-Antonelli," I said. "How nice to see you here." "Call me Ben. Your sister invited me," he added deprecatingly. "After hearing Elizabeth talk so much about the store, I thought it was time to see it."

As he talked I smiled at him, observing details — the curl in his thinning hair, the chocolate brown of his eyes behind the glasses — that stripped away the classroom and restored his masculinity. Perhaps something showed in my face, because within two exchanges about the art and books he had mentioned a mortgage, a wife.

I countered with a deflection of my own — running a business — and somehow the conversation shifted from awkward to interesting. "Elizabeth has decided on another career change, you'll be glad to know," I said.

He smiled, a real one this time. "What's that, five for this semester? Well, I like a kid with ambition. What's the new one?"

"Music lady. Not musician, you understand —"

I expected a laugh, got a rueful nod, and a hard-to-interpret "Hmm."

"Is there a problem?" I said. The ready fears of parenthood sharpened my voice.

Immediately his face smoothed back into teacher blandness. "The 'music lady' is an experiment," he said. "She appeared one day, offered to give the students a music program. Free. Budget being what it is, we said sure." He added quickly, "There's always at least one staff member with her for every session, and the children are in supervised groups."

"What's so different about this woman?" I asked in a more normal voice.

He rubbed his upper lip, sighed. "I've monitored a few sessions — of course. She just plays for them, sometimes tells them stories about where the songs come from. Absolutely remarkable control of the kids. They do just what she asks, whether it's to sing along, or dance, or even sit still."

"A hundred seven-year-olds sit still?" I asked, laughing. "She must be a magician."

"Well, that's what Cara Fischmann at the daycare annex says." Ben shook his head in patent admiration. "Madame Wanda — that's what she calls herself — showed up there late one day. Couple weeks ago, right after we'd had that six days straight of rain. Kids were wild, toddlers screaming, staff going crazy. Out comes the violin, and within ten minutes the babies were asleep and the rest of them sitting in a circle just like a Victorian illustration."

I remembered the animals upstairs. The adrenal-pang I felt took some time to interpret. Excitement, jealousy, desire. A little fright.

"This I have to see."

The *Three Furies*. I'd never said it out loud, of course. But the image surfaced with the tides of school events. Spring, Margaret Cielo, and I — the only single mothers in this second grade class, all three of us with single daughters — hovered over our respective fledglings like falcons over the nest.

An unspoken kinship, our singleness was enough to draw us to sit together at Parents' Night presentations, and enabled us to begin conversations without the preliminary minuets of mutual child-praise and compliment-seeking, arrowing straight for the worries. "Do you think it's all right for the children to ...?" "Do they know enough about the effects of this new program ...?" And always, the quick moment of suspicion — the edge of hostility behind the determined smile and bright tone — when a stranger was suddenly introduced into the children's lives when we were not at hand.

We Furies were all there, standing together against the wall at the back of the big multi-purpose room. A scattering of other parents hovered along the perimeter, some waving surreptitiously at offspring as the classes filed in on orderly lines that harkened back to our own childhoods.

The children sat on the floor in neat rows, their wriggings and giggles barely restrained by the hissed admonitions of the vigilant teachers.

Then a nut-brown woman swirled into the room, bright-colored draperies fluttering, her gray-streaked chignon askew on her narrow head. Hairs drifted around her lined face as if charged by electric current.

In her arms she bore, like a trophy, a huge woven basket. She set it down; the scratch of the basket on the tile floor was audible in the suddenly quiet room.

"I promised dancing today, didn't I?" Madame Wanda chirped in a cracked voice like an old parrot, her words bearing the trace of accent.

"Yeah!" The kids gave a big cheer, clapping and talking.

Teachers moved to damp the noise, but the woman ignored it as she rummaged through her basket. She pulled up a fiddle, and set

it to her chin, drawing the bow across the strings. A clear tone sang, cutting through the voices and rustlings.

"We'll have some Celtic and some African today. This first one is for all you Brians and Caitlins and Megans and Roberts."

In the second row, Margaret's tiny, thin Megan flushed with pleasure at hearing her name.

Tapping her toe softly, Madame Wanda set a brisk beat, then launched into a wild melody that skipped between major and minor keys. I found myself swaying, and, on my left, Spring jiggled and twisted to the beat, an unlikely figure in her crisp medical-technician uniform.

On my right, Margaret was rigid, her breathing a soft hiss through the music. In front of us, the children danced, most of them with the unconscious abandon of young animals. Here and there were tight little groups of the more timid, my Elizabeth among them. These boys and girls bounced together, watching each other for clues and giggling helplessly, their limbs straight and stiff. Behind Elizabeth's group, a self-possessed little girl with little talent but lots of training bobbed through a set of ballet combinations. Near her, breathing hard, Shay watched, then suddenly launched into a dance of her own. She soon had a circle of clear space in which she twirled and leaped, her eyes half-closed, her hands and feet controlled with balletic grace. And like a thin little shadow, her face exalted, Megan copied her.

When the song wound to its close the children groaned, but straight away the woman began another melody, this one slower and compelling in a different way. Most of the children did not know how to dance slowly, and some stood about swaying or watching, until Shay and a couple of boys began pantomiming birds in flight. Flocks of children raised arms to copy, and for several stanzas the floor rumbled as children swooped round and round in circles.

The third piece was fast, with a Middle Eastern feel to it. This time many of the children gathered naturally into circles, stomping and clapping in rhythm as the more adventurous moved into the center of the circle and danced.

Then Madame Wanda put away the violin and with quick motion of her hand, bade the children sit down. Laughing and talking, they did so, but again silence fell with surprising swiftness when she tapped softly at a big drum.

"Picture time," she said. "We are in Africa, flying over the veldt. What animals do we see?"

With light taps and thundering, complicated drumbeats she evoked an array of familiar beasts and birds. The children sat, most of them still and with eyes closed, concentrating on the sounds, and on her few words.

"And last," she said, pulling out a flute, "see your own story. See a happy story, and send it skipping out into the world."

Again I did not recognize the music, though some of the melodic themes seemed familiar, this time from African folk music. The sweetness of the complex harmonies line pulled at emotion, memory, and imagination, until at last I shut my eyes and daydreamed of long summer days and fountains in the sunlight and gazing up through wind-drifting hair into a pair of handsome dark eyes, and seeing my own happiness reflected there.

Does everyone have a kind of internal code? The *Three Furies*; the *Flash*.

In my seven years with Elizabeth, there have been half a dozen moments my internal speaker calls the *Flash*. I'm with her, working or playing — the first time she was barely six months old — or doing some childish activity while my mind runs on other matters. I still don't know what causes me to look up — some subtle mechanism that I cannot perceive? — but I do, to see her eyes gazing directly into mine with a watchful assessment that ignites a frisson. I smile, consciously infusing all my love into voice and face, and I see her pupils contract as she smiles back. The moment is just like that snap of static electricity between flesh and metal, but it is internal, and it is not quite pain, or pleasure, but something of both.

Does she feel it as well? Does the metal discharge the static, or does the flesh?

I can't remember my mother's eyes. In those old photos, she's squinting against the sunlight. I can recall Gran's pale blue gaze, and its variety of expressions, from angry to searching, but I don't remember any flash. My father never met anyone's eyes.

And is it just limited to parents? I've never asked another adult, even my sister. I'm not sure what the greater risk is — to find out they don't know what I'm talking about, or that they have it all the time, with parents, children, lovers.

There was no flash with Elizabeth's father. There was no real joy, or even anger, just the mild, slightly bewildered pleasure of two socially awkward people who have managed to fumble their way into a relationship. Fearful of giving pain, neither of us ever said no to the other, and so we met at parties, then alone, then found our way to bed. When I discovered that I was pregnant, we stumbled through a conversation more painfully clumsy than any we'd ever had — arriving at no conclusion — following which he simply disappeared, and my regret was sufficiently tempered with relief that I never tried to find him.

My ideal has always been the men in nineteenth-century novels — well-spoken, elegantly dressed, romantic — and my favorite of all is Will Ladislav from *Middlemarch*. He's everything a hero should be: romantic, artistic, passionate but honorable, just dangerous enough not to give a damn what society thinks of him.

In my dreams I am Dorothea Casaubon — clever, wise, and fervent — and not just nerdy Barbra Meredith, older sister to outgoing, charming Marilyn.

When Madame Wanda's music ended, I surrendered my daydream reluctantly, scarcely aware of anything around me until I became aware of Spring muttering softly: "Shit, shit, shit, shit, *shit*."

I jerked my head up, saw the children pressing round Madame Wanda, who was nearly hidden from view behind a forest of wildly waving hands. I realized she was handing out sheet music, one to each child. I kept watching until the gnarled fingers plunged once more into the basket, pulled out a sheet for my own daughter, who turned away grinning, the paper clutched tightly to her chest.

"What's wrong?" I asked Spring.

"Look." She pointed across to the other wall, where a knot of women stood. With surprise, I recognized the sharp angles of anger, of distrust.

As I watched, one of the women lifted her chin and spoke. "Margaret."

It was a summons. Margaret Cielo stood halfway between us and them, biting her lip. In the dwindling group of children, Megan waited, her happy face upturned, her hand waving eagerly for one of those sheets of paper.

Spring muttered, "It's Alison Evans and her goddamn pantygirdle Nazi squad. You just watch — they've decided the old lady's some kind of Satanic Pied Piper."

"Madame Wanda?" I asked stupidly. Now all my good mood had evaporated. As the last children walked out, orderly and in lines once again, I watched Madame Wanda bend and pack away her instruments into her basket. "I thought you weren't sure about this program," I said.

"I don't want anyone pushing my kid into ballet. Madame Wanda obviously isn't doing anything like that. Evans and her gang are pissed because their kids had a good time. Which means they're going straight to hell. Look at 'em!" She pointed at the tight circle of women, who were talking in subdued whispers. Alison Evans' thin hands gestured; I could see the tendons standing out. "Fundie buttheads," Spring snarled. "They spoiled Halloween for every kid at this school, but they're not going to get away with ruining this."

She started marching away, then turned, and stared at me. "You coming? We gotta get to the principal first. Or are you going to let them take over?" Alison Evans looked up, her lips compressed.

"I just want to listen," I said.

"Suit yourself," Spring said, her unplucked brows meeting in a straight line as she glared across the room at Alison Evans. For a

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moment the two women gazed at one another, then Spring muttered, "Asshole," and stalked to the door.

Alison Evans' carefully groomed face betrayed no expression beyond a very slight distaste. As the other women waited, she stepped up to Madame Wanda and cleared her throat delicately.

Madame Wanda paused, looked up, then straightened with a bounce, her crinkled face beaming with happy expectation. "Yes? You have a question, ma'am?"

"Just one or two," Mrs. Evans said, in her faint, precise voice. I had never seen her in anything but a dress, her hair lacquered into obedience, her sensible, elegant low heels shiny. Her daughter always wore lacy dresses, even to play in. Ladylike, that was Mrs. Evans. We had never exchanged a word; I was a little afraid of her.

"Please." Madame Wanda dropped her basket, and folded her hands, her eyes narrowed searchingly. "Ask."

"There are many parents at this school who are actively concerned with their children's education," Mrs. Evans said.

Madame Wanda bowed her head in a bobbing little nod. "This is good, it is good," she said.

"Not just academics," Mrs. Evans said in her well-modulated voice. "Their morals and ethics ... words many people do not value, these days, I fear."

"I value them," Madame Wanda said.

Mrs. Evans' mouth smiled sweetly, but her voice sharpened just a little. "Then you will immediately understand that we want our children to grow up with a good grasp of reality — of truth. Indulging in fantasy mars the clear understanding of truth, and can lead very often to evil thoughts and behaviors."

"To see, to hold, beauty in the mind ... it is very like a prayer," Madame Wanda said slowly.

Mrs. Evans' chin lifted. "That is not prayer," she said. "I'm very sorry, but this —" She waved her hand at the auditorium — is not at all the type of prayer Our Lord clearly instructed his followers to use. I am very much afraid my daughter will not be able to participate in this program, not when there is a question of her spiritual health." She turned away, gathering the others with a look. Margaret followed, but she was biting her lip in the old, frightened way.

In silence they walked to the door, their high heels clacking. I realized I was alone with Madame Wanda. She faced me, her hands still folded. She was waiting.

Suddenly I, who was always part of the audience, was on stage. I thought wildly, said, "My daughter loves the 'Animal Dance.'"

Again, that beaming smile, like the glow of sun meeting fountain. "She wanted something to make her pets happy."

She remembered my daughter. Out of all those kids, she remembered mine. What does that mean? I gave an awkward laugh that echoed in the almost-empty room. All the happiness had been drained out of it, leaving me feeling clumsy and exposed and apprehensive. "The pets seemed to be listening," I said, looking at her wispy hair, her gnarled hands. "Well, I won't take up your time. Good-bye."

She gave that little nodding bow. "Good day."

"Margaret Cielo," Marly said, chin in hands. "Isn't she the one

with the stalker husband?"

"Ex-husband," I said. "He's gone now." Upstairs, unbidden, Elizabeth began her warm-up scales.

"And those church women saved her life." Marly pursed her lips.

"They stayed with her when she got the restraining order. They sat with her through the trial. When he got out of jail, they went to her house and camped there. He apparently came twice, and each time they were there, and offered to pray with him. He hasn't been seen or heard of since."

Marly whistled. "Didn't he break her arm a couple of times, and burn her with cigarettes?"

"Her arm and her jaw. Ribs another time. It was Megan he burned with the cigarettes," I said.

Marly shuddered. "I woulda got a shotgun."

"You wouldn't have stayed with him that long."

Marly's eyes narrowed.

It had been terrifying enough to hear about from a distance. As I watched my sister's tapping, I realized there was a second issue, equally disturbing. It had nothing to do with Margaret, or with Madame Wanda. It was between us.

"I didn't mean that as an insult," I said quickly. "About your relationships." I gave that stupid laugh I hate so much; it was a defensive noise, no humor at all, and it had come out me, like a rabbit's bleat, ever since I was small. "At least you have some."

Marly began tapping her fork in time to Elizabeth's rhythm. "I wish I'd known about that creep," she said slowly. "I would've liked to give him a taste of his own temper."

I pressed my arms across my stomach, trying not to imagine myself in Margaret's place. It had been terrifying enough to hear about from a distance. As I watched my sister's tapping, I realized there was a second issue, equally disturbing. It had nothing to do with Margaret, or with Madame Wanda. It was between us.

Marly sighed. "Well, I don't see how they could get their knickers in a twist over this music lady. So she's got some sort of nutty New Age idea she's spreading good vibes by mental magic. How can that hurt anyone? I mean, listen." She cocked her head. "You'd think parents — even religious nuts — would be glad to have their kid show that kind of interest in the arts."

Elizabeth had finished her scales and promptly launched into her new piece. Tension seemed to drain from my body as I listened to the new melody. The image of Margaret's battered face was replaced with breeze-stirred roses in the slanting rays of afternoon, with bees weaving sleepily among the blossoms.

"Stained-glass windows," Marly said, smiling up at the ceiling. "That song makes me think of stained-glass and jewelry and fireworks." She paused, and I realized too late that she had been waiting for me to tell her what I'd been thinking. Though I'd never considered telling anyone about my *Middlemarch* daydream, this image of a summer garden I would have shared. But it was too late.

Marly pursed her lips, then said, "You knew what was happening to Margaret while it happened, didn't you. Yet you didn't try to help."

Her tone was reflective, not at all accusing, but the tension returned to my guts. Upstairs, Elizabeth began the new melody again. The joy seemed to have gone out of it; she played it faster.

"How could I have helped?" I said. "I don't really know her ...

and even if I had, I would have been terrified he'd just go after me for interfering." Memory: Margaret's fearful face when she came to pick up her daughter, then in kindergarten, and my watching her, wishing I could somehow get the power to rescue her.

"Those fundie women faced him."

"They did it in groups. He couldn't fight a whole group. They stayed with her in shifts — some all night, some all day. They refused to leave, and when he cussed at them, they prayed at him."

"It seems to have worked." She quirked her brows, then the humor faded from her expression, and she gazed directly at me, her brown eyes steady. My own gazed dropped to the fork in her fingers. "Maybe that's what you ought to do, Barb," she said. "Get religion."

And there it was after all, the issue between us, uncovered like a well, while Elizabeth's music rained around us.

"What I need is courage," I said.

"For what?" she asked. "Just to sit on the sidelines and watch while everyone else makes dumb mistakes? I was always the one who fell down when we were kids, not you. I got the scraped knees, the dirty clothes, got laughed at in public, and got yelled at by Gram. Not you."

"I watched you get hurt," I said, fighting to keep my voice steady. "I was always afraid to get hurt like you did. When we were little, and when we were adults."

She sighed, and closed her eyes. "Did it hurt when Ron left you?"

"Yes ... no. Not really. It was actually kind of a relief."

She shook her head. "You didn't love the guy, but you not only slept with him, you had his kid. We're like a couple of aliens, Barb."

"Don't be mad at me," I said tightly. Upstairs the piano was silent.

Marly laughed, and lunged across the table to press her cheek against mine. She smelled like cinnamon and hair mousse and like my little sister when we used to get out of the bath. "I'm not mad," she said. "We are what we are — a pianist bookworm and a brilliant actress who can't get work." She cocked her head again. "But I don't think you should bail on this hearing at the school."

I shook my head. "How can I do anything? Spring is going to war — talked to a lawyer and everything. And Mrs. Evans will get her church gang out in full force. It's going to be nasty, and anyone else who speaks will get ground up in the crossfire —" I heard a step behind me, and stopped.

"Mom? Are you going to the meeting tonight?"

I turned around. Elizabeth stood in the doorway, her eyes enormous.

"I don't know," I said. "Religious brangles aren't my scene."

"You have to." Elizabeth marched into the kitchen, her hands on her hips. "Marie Fleur says the music lady is like an angel, teaching us good things. But Suzi Evans says the music lady is wicked, and she also said that Marie isn't a *real* Christian. But Marie's a Catholic, which is the oldest kind, so she should know, shouldn't she?"

"Suzi and her mom are fundies," Marly said with satisfaction. "They believe in mind-control and they preach hatred."

I frowned at her. "Never mind — Aunt Marly is just kidding," I said. "Have you kids been fighting at school?"

Elizabeth nodded firmly. Again I saw a small Marly in the way she threw her arms wide and proclaimed, "Suzi Evans came to school today and said that anyone who goes to the music lady is going straight to Hell. They burn you there, for ever and ever." She paused, then turned to me, her brows knit. "Is that true?"

"Of course not," Marly exclaimed. "Hell's just a fairy tale someone made up to get kids to behave."

Elizabeth's mouth opened in a surprised O. "But Suzi isn't allowed to do make-believe," she said. "She gets *spanked* if she does make-believe!"

I sent a dirty look at Marly and said with heavy meaning, "Kids often repeat things they hear adults say, and sometimes they get it wrong, Elizabeth." Marly sighed, and I went on. "The main thing is, does Madame Wanda know you're fighting about her? I'll bet anything she wouldn't like it, any more than she would have liked the way you just played her song."

"That's because I'm mad," Elizabeth said, crossing her arms with

a dramatic toss of her head. "Suzi's mom wants to take away the music lady, just like she did our school Trick-or-Treat carnival. You can't let it happen, Mom. I love the music lady. You have to go, Mom!"

Marly turned from Elizabeth to me, her brown eyes that were so much like Elizabeth's narrowed just the same way, her nails tapping on the table. Suddenly she sat up straight, her eyes widening, her hands gesturing, and in her most theatrical voice, she started to quote:

"And when all were in to the very last,
The door in the mountain-side shut fast.
'Did I say all?'"

She turned to Elizabeth, who still accepted the incomprehensibility of adults' orthogonal subject-changes. My daughter recognized the poem immediately, of course — she and Marly had read it together every night through the preceding winter. On cue, she said, "'No! One was lame ...'"

Smiling, Marly prompted, "'And could not dance the whole of the way ...'"

The high voice and the low, in antiphonal melody, quoted Browning's lines, and I remembered the eight-year-old Marly carrying off the school Talent Show prize with just that poem, in the teeth of angry and bemused sixth graders who had expected to win.

I watched my daughter's bright eyes, her quick breathing, as they swapped lines, building toward her own favorite.

"For he led us, he said, to a joyous land' ... " Marly whispered in a thrilling voice.

"Joining the town and just at hand!" Elizabeth chanted back.

Faster and faster came the lines about the magical land in the mountain:

"The sparrows were brighter than peacocks here' ... "

"And their dogs outran our fallow deer' ... "

"And honey-bees," Marly said lingeringly, leaning forward on her chair, "'had lost their stings — '"

Elizabeth danced around the room, shouting, "'And horses were born with eagles' wings!'"

"Eagles' wings!"

"Eagles' wings," Elizabeth cried, laughing. And lifting her arms, she ran about the room making horse noises and pretending to fly. Together they said the favorite line one more time, then, more quietly, more slowly, they finished the poem, Marly watching me over my daughter's head.

I said nothing, but when the performance was over, I clapped, and they both curtsied, laughing, so alike and so not alike. To my sister I said, "I take your point." And breathing deeply, I added, "I won't be the little lame boy closed out of the mountain, this time. I promise."



nce, when we were younger, Marly had told me the secret of facing people was to play a role. I thought at the time that this was a recipe for a phony encounter — what if everyone is playing roles, how can there be any meeting of minds? What would be the point?

But now I tried to clothe myself in Dorothea Casaubon's personality.

As I drove to the school, my insides churning with stomach acid, I worked hard to calm myself, to envision myself in one of her black gowns. Tall, graceful, with the bright, sincere eyes of the crusader for all that is good and kind in human nature. She had also been a Christian, and for a short time I wished I had some kind of religion; but what came in memory was Gran's dry voice constantly chiding us for sinning, and Dad's whisper over her coffin at the funeral: *It's all self-delusion. There's no meaning to life, none to death. Just pain, and our attempts to wall ourselves against it.*

I'd gone with Spring to a couple of the New Age groups she and her mother had joined over the last ten years. It had been fun, sometimes faintly embarrassing, but I'd never felt any cosmic flash, or gained any significant insight. I didn't think the Evans crowd had it either; in surrendering her freedom of choice Margaret Cielo might

have found security, but she still did not seem to have peace.

Why are we here? I thought, and drifts of melodies ran through my mind, not enough to bring back joyful dreams. Madame Wanda's music was a wall against the pain, that much I could defend. What I didn't understand, was how she managed to make it work for so many children. Spring had called her a Pied Piper; Madame Wanda herself had termed it prayer. *She must be a magician*, I heard my own voice to Elizabeth's teacher. Remarkable ... miraculous.

That was what had scared Alison Evans. Just hearing about it from the teacher had scared me. Did the woman really control the kids? Did she have some kind of, well, power?

Would I have the guts to ask? As I cruised along the crammed parking lot, I tried to see myself standing up and speaking out. Maybe if I thought out my words ahead of time, I wouldn't sound foolish.

I found a spot further down the street, and walking back I looked at the long line of cars, mute testimony to the troubled minds of the other parents. Would we go to this much trouble for ourselves? Marly was right, I decided, as I smoothed down my good skirt. I would sit on the sidelines if it concerned my own happiness. When it came to Elizabeth's, protective anger made me brave.

The auditorium was already full, the air warm and stale-smelling. A dull roar of sound enfolded me. Head down, muttering polite *Excuse-mes*, I made my way past the line of parents standing along the walls, looking for a space.

The line ended near the door to backstage. I was next to the first couple rows, but from my angle I could only see the very front of the stage.

"Barb!"

Heads turned; Spring rose from the front row, almost unrecognizable in a formidable blue wool suit, expensive gems dangling from her ears. She crossed the floor rather mincingly in her high heels, and grinned. "Like the power clothes? And look at Mom, wearing her Satan Special." She turned, and I saw Judyth Dorisdottir waving, her plump body squeezed into an aggressively red dress. "If I'd known you were coming, I would've saved you a seat."

"It's okay. I can see from here," I said.

"Look at that pile of lead-lined hypocrites," Spring said. Her voice wasn't modulated at all.

**That was what had scared Alison
Evans. Just hearing about it from the
teacher had scared me. Did the woman
really control the kids? Did she have
some kind of, well, power?**

I glanced past her dismissive hand, saw bowed heads in the first four rows on the other side of the auditorium.

"Yakking of peace and goodwill at Christmas, but by God the rest of the year they're working hard to make sure every kid in reach is forced into their goose-stepping obedience trip." She grinned again. "Bet old Reed's butt's been on fire today; every lawyer in town must've called. I know ours did — she said last fall that she couldn't do anything about Halloween as it was originally a religious holiday, but this here is a clear infringement of constitutional right." She dusted her hands as she said, "Separation of Church and State. Damn, that sounds mighty official, doesn't it?" She gloated so obviously I had to laugh.

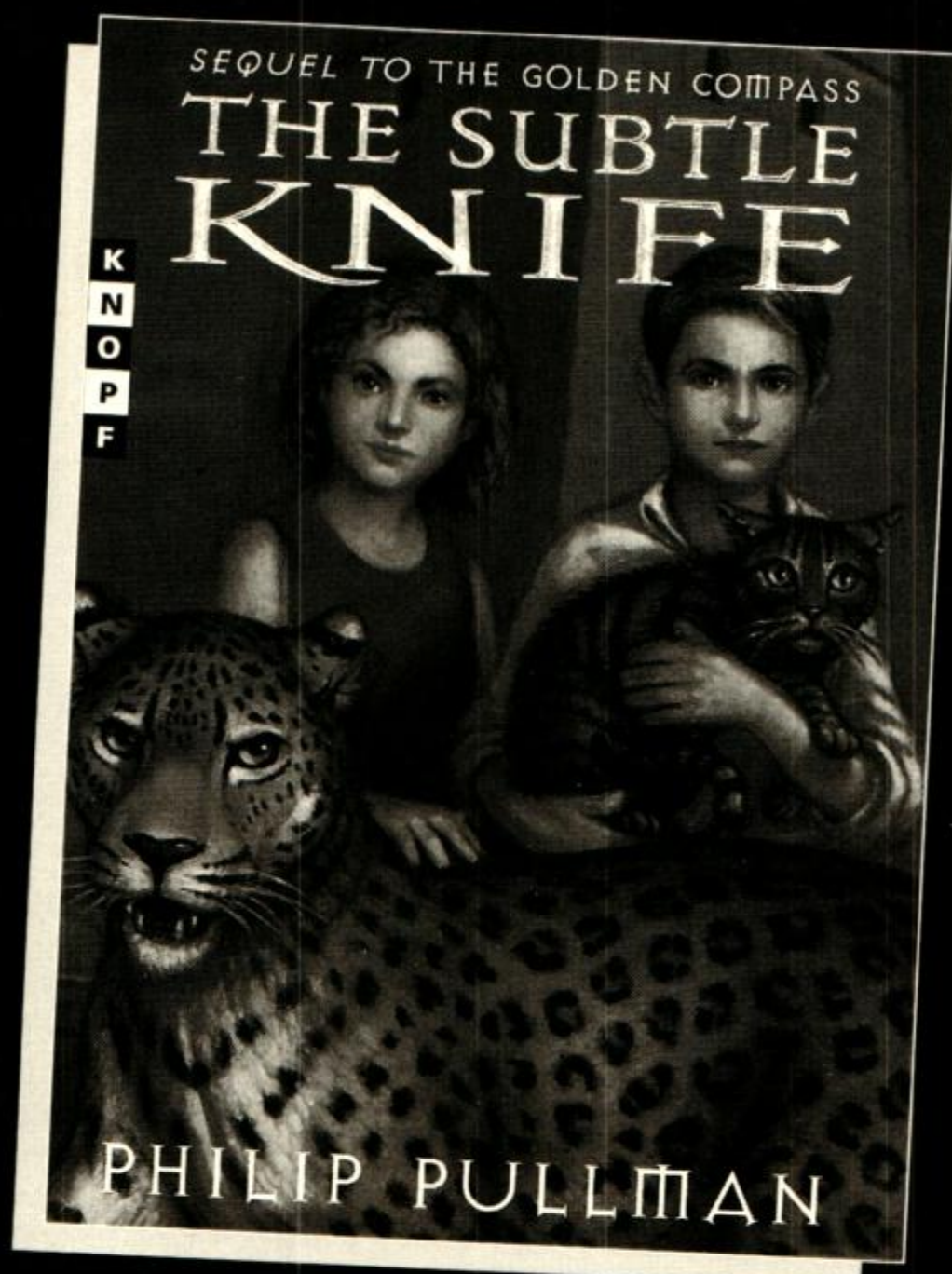
Before I could frame an answer, the principal came out and held up his hands. Spring hustled back to her seat, teetering a little on her seldom-worn heels; the roar of low conversation dwindled into

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↪ Where does love live when the
body is gone? It waits quietly in a
house by the side of the road. ↪

The Lady of Shalott House

A RIVER LIKE BLACK GLASS RAN BY THE PLACE. ABOVE, BONE PALE, stood the old house with its dark, sloped roofs. It had one of those towers, too, where a pair of windows face each other, so the light of the sky through one, shines out through the other, and this other window, looking down to the road, seemed even by day to have a lamp in it. All around went the hills, also pale and bleached by the sun. Trees grew on some with sombre leaves. And by the river grew strange huge marigolds — if they were — the color of orange curd.

Carey Pearce, who had not yet become a well-known painter, paused on the road, staring across the river, up at the house, and the hills behind. He began memorizing the scene for a canvas, especially the marigolds, which looked primal and nearly carnivorous.

It was late afternoon, and he was on his way to the home of distant cousins he had never met. The train ran only to the station he had left an hour before, and here the horse he had been promised was out on other business. Carrying his bag, therefore, he had started to walk. He found this a haphazard country all told, but one he liked. He did not think he would reach the house of his cousins until evening.



BY TANITH LEE

Illustration by Mary O'Keefe Young

Down in the valley to the south, he could see the black trail of the railway, and along it another toy train was just now puffing, its smokestack sending up a plume into the westering sun-ambered sky.

When Carey glanced back at the pale house, he saw that a woman was seated on the veranda. And she had hair, he afterward said, definitely the exact shade of the marigolds by the river.

He thought she had not been there before, but now she was. She looked at the road, or maybe at the train below. In any case, he raised his hat.

Her dress was dark, caught with a silver brooch at the throat. She was of that slim small type, and her face seemed an unusual one under the pile of remarkable hair.

Carey moved off the road, went over the river by a narrow bridge, brushed through the marigolds, and came up to a white-painted picket fence. Here he stood and gazed up, and the woman looked back at him.

"Can you tell me, am I on the right road for the Hannifer house?"

He realized then she had not been looking at him, or not truly, for now her eyes seemed to change. It was, he thought, as if a cloudy liquid grew suddenly clear.

"Oh, yes," she said. She had a sweet voice. He decided she might be able to sing well.

"I hope it's near. I've walked from the station, and it's a hot day."

All this was blatant deception. He knew perfectly well he was on the right road, and knew too he had another hour's walk at least before him. He was fit, his bag was light enough, and he was used to walking; he had climbed fells in England, and small Alps in France, from dawn to dusk, in search of images to paint.

What he wanted was that the woman with marigold hair would invite him to step up and sit with her. She was beautiful, and in an almost classical way. Just as he knew when he had found the view he wanted, so he knew he had found in her a portrait. No doubt there was a husband, even children, and probably servants, in the pale house. He must charm them all, and be asked back.

She did not speak at first, then she said, "It's a long way, I fear." She sounded remote, like a well-schooled infant who does not know the precise meaning of the lesson he has learned.

"Very long?" inquired Carey, putting a querulous note into his tone. "Oh, I was on that train for thirteen hours, cooked alive. They said I'd find a horse to ride at the station, but no such luck."

In the garden that climbed to the house, bushes of fiery flowers had run wild. A parrot tree stooped almost to the ground with unpicked fruit.

She said, "You must be tired."

But nothing else.

Then he looked more attentively at the house. The sun was on it, burning on the windows, just as the bright north sky burned through the window of the tower. But he seemed to see curtains drawn, or absent. The veranda was in want of repair. There was an old rocker in which she sat, and one other chair, a notable one with carved back and arms. A cane table had been set between, and he noticed now all at once it had a decanter on it and a crystal jug, and two tall glasses and two glasses for wine. But in the decanter and the jug and the glasses was nothing, nothing at all but a thick smoke of dust shining in the low sun.

Carey Pearce said, "I wonder if I might come up and sit with you for a few minutes. Forgive my boldness. Perhaps your husband —"

She said, "My brother has gone away. But come up if you want. I have nothing to offer you —" this struck him oddly, she did not say it in a churlish way — "but the river is very pure, if you wish to drink."

Carey took her at her word. He went down the bank, knelt, and cupped up in his hand a couple of mouthfuls of the black, bright, transparent water. It was clean and pleasant. But he had wanted to show her he was accepting her hospitality, such as it was.

Something must have happened here, some family matter. The brother gone away, the servants vanished.

He opened a little white gate in the picket fence, and went through. He went up the garden path under the parrot tree, and up

the steps to the veranda. As he stood over her, she lifted her pale quiet face to his. His heart stopped a moment. She had that kind of loveliness which makes its subject seem known, as if we half recall something very beautiful from another time and place, for here is its reminder.

"I'm sorry to trouble you," he said.

"It's no trouble."

"My name is Carey Pearce," he said. "My cousins are the Hannifers, but we've never met. May I sit down?"

She looked at the other chair, and then back at him, and all at once she laughed. It was a soft melodious laugh, not exactly mocking — more playful. "Please do, Mr. Pearce."

He sat. And there was another odd thing. The chair, though such a good one, felt extremely uncomfortable. He thought at first he was more travel-worn than he had believed, and serve him right for pretending to be so. Then he concluded that it was simply a badly made chair, all show and no substance.

But he opened his bag and took out a bottle of fruit cordial.

"May I offer you some of this?"

"Oh no. Nothing, thank you."

"Then, do you object if I drink it alone?"

She said then, without the least sign or nuance of rudeness, "Don't use the glasses, Mr. Pearce."

He supposed she was sensible of their dirtiness, so he nodded, and drank the cordial from the bottle.

Then she folded her hands in her lap and rested her wonderful head back on her chair, and she began gently to rock. She said not a word, yet it was not from shyness, he thought, nor coldness. It was as if she knew him well, and might be silent with him without offense.

He was used to silence himself, and unlike most people often alone, he rather liked it.

So he sat in the uncomfortable chair as comfortably as he could, which was not very, and looked down the hills to the valley and the snake coils of the train track, looked at the exotic sombre-leaved trees and the flames of the flowers. He listened to the hush of that wide, scorched land, broken only now and then by a daytime cricket, and once by the whistle of an unseen bird.

The sun slanted more and more to the west, and a line of clouds, a herd of them, tumbled slowly before it.

At intervals, he turned and studied the woman very carefully. She did not seem to mind this, if she was aware of it at all. Throughout his life Carey had had the knack of making a mental sketch, for he had begun early to want sometimes to create pictures of things and spots where sketching on paper was either inadvisable or frankly impossible. But he drew the lines of the woman's face over and over in his mind, cautiously etched in the translucent first shadows, and the dilute clear amber of the light — and the wash of hair that would be so easy to paint with some splash of color direct from a tube, which meant he must be more subtle and try to capture it another way.

She was about twenty-five, he thought, not quite young, but not turned either, as women often did in this climate, so that dryness and toughness of skin the critic termed *leathering*. Her eyes were grey-azure, opaque yet glimmering as moonstones. If he could reproduce that, and the angle of her brows, the lilt of her throat with the small winking brooch at its nadir, he would have something very fine.

The sun was now into the clouds, herding them down beyond the valley. A certain alteration of blueness was at the core of the sky. The day was working toward sunset.

He said, rather low, not to break her reverie harshly, "It's late. I'd better be getting on. Thank you for your oasis."

She did not look at him now. Her eyes were back on the road. She said, "Go safely."

"You're kind. I will. And you."

"Oh, I am safe enough," she said.

But when he was out of the awful chair and standing, a compunction seized him as if he had only just become aware of things.

"Are you quite alone here? Is everything all right with you? Shall I —?"

"Everything's well," she said.

That was all.

But when he gazed down at her, she was smiling. He thought she seemed happy and at ease. And so he only offered another farewell and left her, walking down through the garden, and closing the gate with elaborate care.

Once over the river and on the road, he turned again to signal goodbye, but the sun had reached just that point to dazzle away the images of the veranda. Indeed, the whole building appeared curiously to float like a bubble, suspended in the air. He could not make her out at all, and perhaps anyway she had now gone inside.

Carey reached the Hannifer house in the last of the dusk. He was struck at once by its bustle and life. Kerosene lamps hung along the veranda, every window was lit behind its lace, rosy yellow, and men and horses came and went through the pastures behind.

Soon enough all the cousins swelled out in a swarm. His hand was wrung, a large beaming woman embraced him. He was led into a parlour with a rose lamp in its window, and presently into supper under a chandelier, with two rough and massive dogs lying for contrast by the hearth.

They were as hungry for his stories of the world as any people he had ever come across. He had to tell them anecdotes of a ship in Africa, and of a French village, and even about the great city he had just left, which most of them had never seen. Between whiles they poured him wine, and loaded his plate of pleasing brown and white china with potatoes, vegetables, pie and relishes. Afterward there was a lemon dessert, and cigarettes and brandy were brought, and he sat alone with the men in an up-country English sort of way, hearing the women's bright laughter in another room.

All this time there had been no opening to speak of anything close to home. Even the omission of the station horse they had swept quickly away with a, "Of all the lousy shows!" But as he and the men now lounged, with the veranda doors wide, and the crickets sounding in their silver night chorus, counterpart to the croak of frogs in the swamp beyond the river, Carey turned to his new cousin, Joseph.

"Before I reached your house, there was another. Just off the road. About three, four miles back. A white house, with a tower."

Joseph Hannifer nodded idly enough. "Yes, that's the Collins place. Run down now."

"I thought I might paint it," said Carey. It was as if something whispered to him, the crickets perhaps, that he must beware what he said. "Who lives there?"

"No one at present. It was Tappy Collins' place, but he moved away years ago."

"Tappy Collins? Now the man at the station mentioned him, I think," lied Carey nimbly, sipping his brandy. A great moth, large as a dollar bill, had come from the night and hovered over the veranda rail above the lamps. The flicker of its wings was like one more warning. "The man said Collins had a sister — or do I have it wrong?"

"Old Ned's a rare old gossip. Right enough Tappy had a sister."

Carey waited, and as he did, considered the tense of the word *had*.

"Had he? I thought —"

"Oh, it's a sad story. A bad story."

Old Uncle Someone — Carey did not yet grasp all the names — had fallen asleep. Two male cousins mildly joked about this. Two others had gone out to see to something in the outbuildings and stables, the dogs padding after them. From the women's parlour winged up more laughter, and the notes of a tinny but game piano.

"Can I know the tale?" asked Carey.

"We're not proud of it," said Joseph. "But there. You'll make a painting of it, maybe." And Carey was alerted to the first hint of acrimony in Joseph Hannifer, his cousin.

Then Joseph told him the story, and the other men were mostly silent, but for the mild-snoring uncle. Now and then one added something. They shook their heads. The room was warm, and

smoky from the pipes, and outside stood the black walls of the night, into which the giant moth flew away.

Tappy Collins had inherited the house from his father. The mother was long dead, though it was she who had given the property its queer and fanciful name. It was the title of some poet's poem — Carey forebore to speak the other name of Tennyson — a crazy notion that was talked about. *Lady of Shalott* the house was called, after this ballad about a damsel who drowned herself. And Carey forebore to correct them, since the Lady of Shalott had not drowned, but only lain down in a magic boat and died of love.

"Well Tappy kept his sister — Maudra, the mother had called her — to look after the house, and it was a downright waste of her. She was a pretty thing, but day-dreamy — perhaps too much that way for some. But she could have made a marriage, no doubt of that. Tappy though, he shut her up at home, and she never saw another soul but him and the maids. They said 'he promised her, When I get wed then you can do as you like'. But perhaps he never said that."

"The man at the station — Ned — told me she had strange-colored hair."

"Orange," said Joseph, and one of the other cousins added, "Yes. Orange as marmalade. But apart from that, she had good looks."

Joseph continued. He said that a day came when a man rode out to the house on business with Tappy Collins, and he took one look at Maudra and wanted her, body and soul. And it was the same with her.

"Trouble was," said Joseph, "the fellow was married already, hard and fast, and no getting out of it."

Carey listened, until the cigarette burned his fingers and the men laughed slyly at him. But his hands were as hard from paint as theirs from manual work, and he did not mind.

He was seeing Maudra and her dreaming eyes, seeing her in love. The man they did not much describe — he had a shock of thick blond hair, enough to turn any silly woman's head. Enough money as well to dress elegantly and smell of cologne. Edmund Dyle was his name.

"Well, he had his way with her. Tappy was off in the city, and they used his house to their own advantage."

"I heard," said another cousin, "they lay down in every room."

Joseph said, "You've got a course tongue, Matt. But so they did, probably."

"What happened then?" said Carey softly.

"Once he'd had his fill, Dyle ran back to his wife," said Joseph. His was, thought Carey, a cruel voice, judgmental and now slightly shrill. Carey no longer liked Joseph. He said nothing. Joseph said, "He's stayed with the wife, too, though off and on he has another fling with some girl or other, with her head on backward and not got the sense she was born with."

The cousin who had also spoken said, "But Maudra died."

Carey breathed out a long sigh. "Did she?"

"Died of a broken heart," said the other cousin. "Poor little thing. She was twenty-five years old."

"She took a fever," said Joseph. "Brain fever. That was how she died. There was a story she drowned herself like the girl in the ballad. But she didn't."

Yet, Carey Pearce thought, Maudra had died rather in the way of the Lady of Shalott after all, if she had died of love, breaking her imprisonment. He said, after a moment, lighting a cigarette, attending the advice of the cautioning crickets, "Ned told me there was some idea the house was haunted. Now I see why."

"Tappy went off soon enough," said Joseph. "But Tappy was a fool."

The Hannifer uncle had woken. He spoke without emphasis. "Two or three persons have seen Maudra Collins sitting on her veranda, since her death, in the old rocker. She looks out to the road." He seemed to watch Carey acutely, maybe it was only the light on his spectacles. "If you wave, she may wave back to you. She's a polite little creature still."

Carey said, "How long ago did she die? Was it recent?"

"Fifteen years," said the uncle. "Sixteen, next March."

Later, Carey climbed the stairs and found a milk-white bedroom, washed himself, and got into bed. He blew out the lamp; there was no gas here, let alone electricity.

In the night, peculiar sounds came from the hills beyond the house of the Hannifers. Carey knew, from all the alien nights he had slept and lain through, in russet little rooms up under thatch, in barns and empty styes, in the wide chambers of hollow, dark hotels, where golden beetles ran about the floors, that the noises of unknown night are always uncanny. He was not alarmed. Nor did the ghost of Maudra dismay him. He had been privileged to get so much more than a wave, to come so close. And he was glad she had not seemed afraid, or said or shown any vestige of her pitiful lonely unloved death. She was peaceful now, hopeful almost. Yes, he was glad.

The next day Joseph Hannifer wanted to ride with his Cousin Carey to the town, ten miles east. The women cousins protested that Carey was too tired, but Carey was not tired, and he was intrigued by Joseph, even not liking Joseph, because Joseph had mostly told him the story of Maudra Collins.

They started early enough, and the sun was white, and the sky that unique brazen sheet that is not blue at all, and the parched hills rolled round them, with their tufts of trees, and the occasional groves of farms, and the woods, and the swampland with its spears of razorous grass and muggy lilies. The horses were strong and courteous. But Cousin Joseph still kept expecting Carey Pearce to make some mistake. When a rabbit bolted across the road, for example, Joseph looked at Carey, all crinkled up in the face, to see the horse shy and throw him. But Carey and the horse were quite calm. Joseph seemed to have made up his mind that a man who painted pictures would be able to do nothing else. Soon Joseph began to talk about illnesses of the region, brainstorms and ailments of the bowel from poisoned water, and about renegades and thieves. All this, it seemed, to see if Carey would get nervous. But Carey only listened and asked reasonable questions.

They were about four miles from the town when Joseph said, almost violently, "Why, see that fellow walking down there, on the road?"

"Yes, I do."

"See his hair?"

Carey looked more fully, and saw the man was flaxen fair, which was not very uncommon here.

Joseph said, "From the style of him, he goes on like that wretch I told you of, Edmund Dyle, Maudra's fancy. Only I'd expect him to be riding."

The sun was going over from the zenith, and it shone from behind them all down the road, and made it, but for their shadows, white and polished as glass. The man appeared half there and half not in this devouring light. He came on at a steady pace, striding west as they rode east, to meet them.

"Edmund Dyle," said Joseph. "It could be. Maybe that rich wife of his got sick of his escapades and threw him out at last."

They rode on, and the man who might be Edmund Dyle drew closer. Carey was interested. He wanted to gaze into the face of Maudra's betrayer, wanted to scan it for future use on canvas. Judas has always been of artistic value, in whatever form.

Even so, Carey felt a little ashamed. Because he thought he understood already that something of Maudra was drawing Edmund Dyle, if so the man was, drawing him to her despite himself. For him she watched the road. For him the best chair waited, unwelcoming of any other — and for him it would be comfortable. And the decanter and the crystal jug would sparkle full of wine and lemonade.

The countryside was empty here, excepting the stands of umbrous trees. Soon enough they came up with the walking man, and when they were some thirty feet from him, Joseph swore. "It's him. I tell you," he added, as if Carey had argued, "it's Dyle."

Joseph reigned in. And so Carey copied him.

"Hey, Dyle! Is it you?"

The walker came on, then stopped. He was near. He looked up at Joseph's face, and as if finding the paucity of it, his eyes continued until they found Carey.

"Sir," said the man on the road, "I've lost my way. I used to know these parts, and yet ... I'm searching for the Collins house."

Joseph vented another curse. But along Carey Pearce's spine there moved upward a pale, quiet electric tremor, as when grass turns before the wind and whitens.

"Follow the road," said Carey. "Just follow the road and you'll come to it. But it's a long way."

"Yes, a long way," said Edmund Dyle. "But I've come a long way already."

Carey meant to say something else, but the words stuck in his mouth. Then, as the man walked by him in his elegant dusty coat, he found to his surprise he said, "God bless you, God bless you both."

Joseph sat his horse, snorted, and kicked its shanks. They rode on again.

"He's gone daft," said Joseph. "It was him, all right, but addled. His tie was all undone. His gloves were stained. And that's no coat to go trekking in."

Carey glanced back. He watched Edmund Dyle walk west along the road, the white sun blazing above and before him. But when Joseph half turned and said angrily, "What's up now?" Carey only answered, "Nothing."

"Is he still there, the idiot?"

"No." To deflect Joseph, Carey lied. "I think he's gone off the road into the trees."

"Good riddance," said Joseph. His face bulged now with malevolence and scorn, and for a while, though never looking back as Carey Pearce had done, Joseph Hannifer railed against the Dyles, all of them.

But when they came to the town and went into a bar there, he had to alter his tune.

So Joseph got drunk, until he had to hurry into the yard, and Carey held his shoulders as he threw up, and then supported Joseph when he sank down.

"We never met that bastard," said Joseph, through his fits of shaking. "Never. Not us. For Christ's sake," said Joseph, as though they had committed a crime on the road "don't tell a soul we met him."

For Edmund Dyle had, the previous evening, shot himself point blank through the heart and dropped dead in his wife's fine house. He left a letter which was now common property, that is, what it said, for he told her he had only ever loved one, and that one not her, but Maudra Collins who had died because of him.

Fifteen years and more the worm of regret had gnawed through Edmund Dyle, and in the end, to stop the pain, he had fired into himself the worst pain of all, which ends all others.

At sundown, Joseph begged Carey that he would not speak of any of this to the family in the Hannifer house, and Carey agreed to be silent.

But in the end, Carey Pearce was not silent at all, for he painted those two pictures, which anyone may see, where they hang in the gallery, or in reproduction. And the pictures speak loudly enough.

The first is the landscape with figure, which he called *The Lady of Shalott House*, a rich study of terrain, but mostly of a girl with extraordinary hair, seated in a rocking chair on a veranda, above the wild garden, and the black river with marigolds.

The second picture is more simple, and stranger. This is called only *Going Home*.

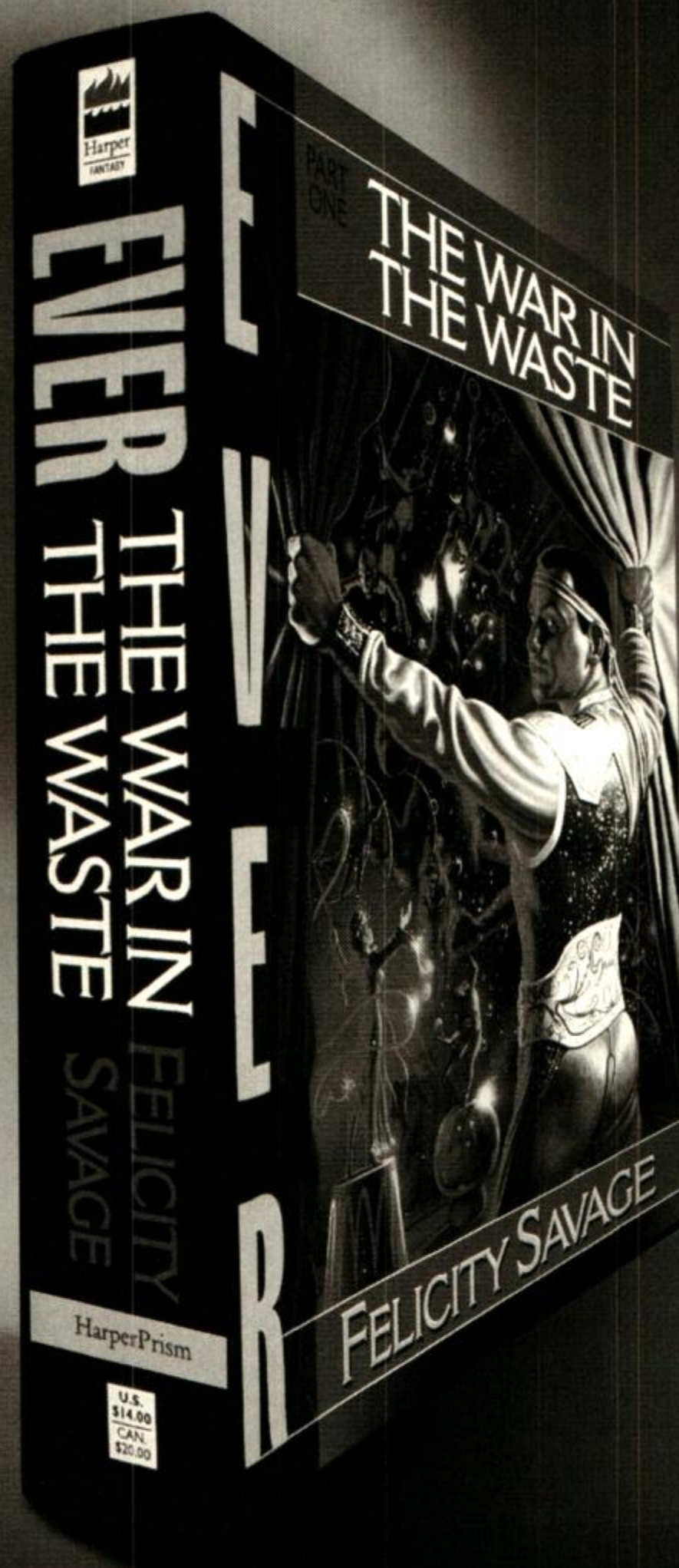
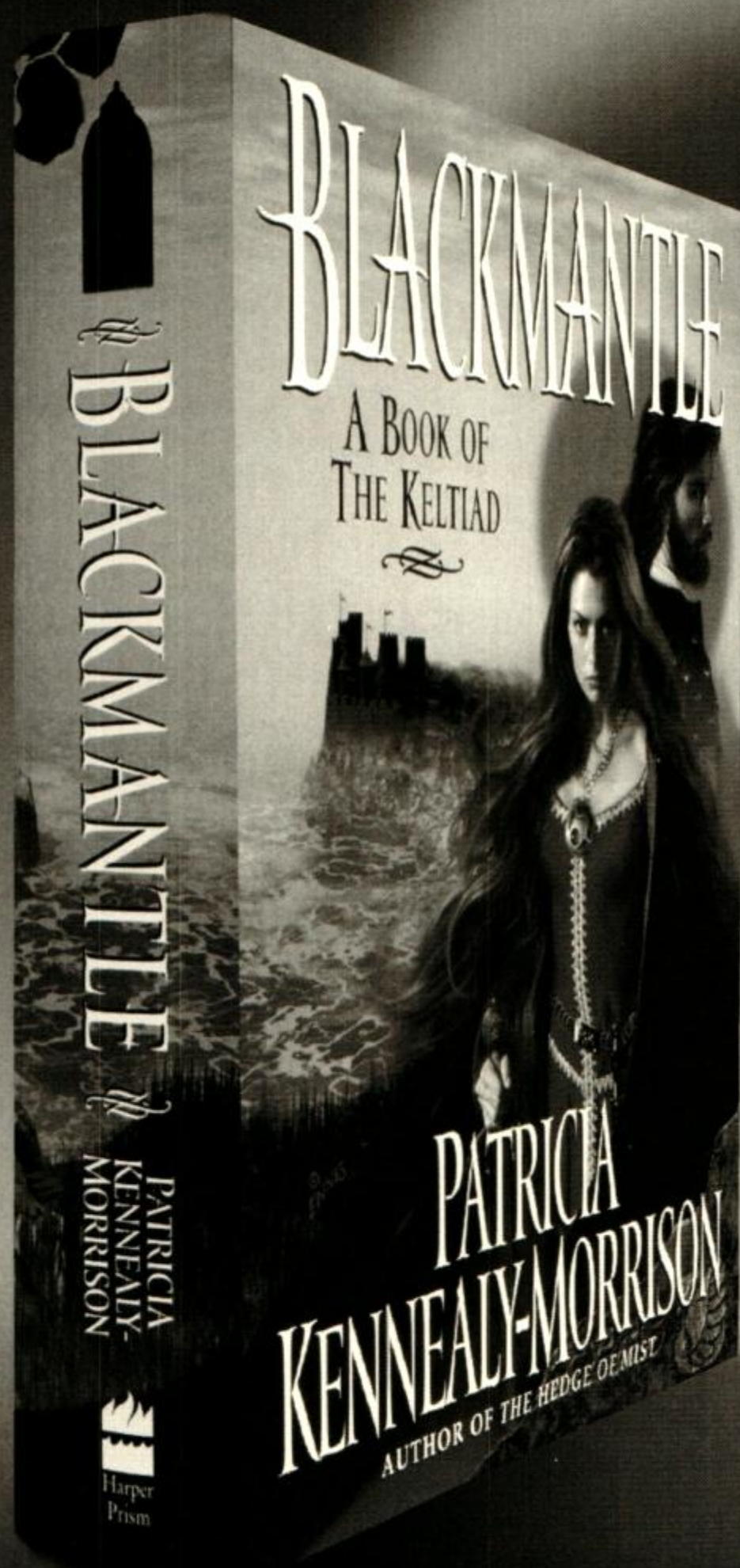
It shows a sun-blasted track which carves between pale hills, and on the track a man, walking away, his back turned to the onlooker.

It is either the worm of regret, or the bullet of a pistol, which has cut right through him, showing what Carey Pearce saw so clearly on the road: how the sun shines straight as a spear through Edmund Dyle's body, at the area of the heart, forming one blinding ray of otherwise inexplicable light. ♣

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Life is full trade-offs, For every White Night, there's a Black Day. For every wish granted, there's one denied.

Leningrad BLUES

BY E.A. JOHNSON

Perhaps you've heard of our wonderful White Nights — of those never-ending days near the summer solstice when the sun almost refuses to set. You can sit outside on a bench in Letnii Sad and read your well-worn volume of Pushkin all through the night. Or, if you happen to be in the mood for romance, you can stroll along the canal embankments with your lover and admire the beauty of a city that has been called the Venice of the North.

Ah, Peter in the summer! Peter — for that is how we natives know our beloved city — is more beautiful than storyteller can tell or pen can write. I can't imagine any other place I would rather be — at least not in the summer.

But what all the Intourist and other travel brochures forget to tell you is that there are some disadvantages to living as far north as your Anchorage in Alaska. And that is the winter. Or, to be more exact, the Black Days of Winter. The cold is something you learn to enjoy. For each blessed White Night our city enjoys, we must all live through a Black Day when the sun forgets to even rise above the horizon. If you can imagine how exhilarating countless hours of uninterrupted daylight can be, you can also understand just how depressing we find the almost endless darkness. But like poor Persephone, we must live out the bargain that was made for us.

Now the story I'm about to tell you happened during some Black Days back in the early 1980s. While this might not seem like a long time ago, it really is a story from another

time and another world. While I live today in St. Petersburg, the place I am about to describe was called Leningrad and could be found in a strange imaginary land known as the Soviet Union. For those of us who were familiar with its dark underbelly, our former country was known as the *Strana Chudes* in honor of Alice's Wonderland.

My father loved to whisper tales about our Wonderland when we gathered in the kitchen to drink our Georgian tea. One of his favorite stories was the one when your Prince Nixon came to Leningrad to visit our Prince Brezhnev. In order to impress the visiting prince, the local rulers painted every single building along the route of his motorcade. But since they didn't have enough paint, they only painted the first two floors of those sides facing the street. After all, how much more of the buildings would be visible from the windows of a limousine rushing past? These Potemkin buildings were only a tiny part of Leningrad's Wonderland.

As my father would say, why bother with fiction when our Soviet life is so much more richly imagined and vastly

Illustration by Broeck Steadman



more entertaining? I should point out that, instead of saying "Soviet life," my father would use the word *sovok* (shovel) in its place. To many of us who lived on the crumbs of communism, the two came to mean much the same thing because "shovels" are what Prince Brezhnev the Contemporaneous once called the inhabitants of his Wonderland. And shovel we did. It was the only way to keep from being buried alive in shit.

But enough of all this. The real story that I meant to tell you was about my friend the musician. Peter — as Pyotr always insisted we call him — was a true *sovok*. He shoveled coal for a living. He did it both out of that twisted sense of irony many Soviets had, and because he was required to have a job, any job. You see, in a country like yours, Peter would probably have been a rock star earning his fortune singing his electrified blues all over the land. But in our peculiar Wonderland, Prince Brezhnev did his best to outlaw rock-'n-roll. But this only pushed the music underground.

Thinking back on it now, we probably would have wanted to keep it that way. Because thanks to our Prince, our music meant something. It meant so much more than the fame or the money that it didn't bring. And, as it turned out, the Prince's men weren't powerful enough to stop the *samizdat* tapes of our city's best bands (Akvarium, Kino, Zoopark, Alisa, and Peter's own Sinnii Kaif) from spreading like a benign cancer all the way from Kaliningrad to Vladivostok. The magic of their music was just too strong. So you see, I think it's only appropriate if I start this story with those ritual words, "once upon a time."

So, once upon a time, during the Black Days of Winter, Peter walked through the snow to his job in the boiler room of Building 39 near the mouth of the Neva River. As the basement where he worked was in the far

and Peter worked their 48-hour shifts in *Chukotka* back-to-back, which made it an ideal place to hold band practice. When no one answered, Peter walked over to the cot hidden behind the boiler. Sasha was sleeping like a hibernating bear. Peter kicked the cot for a few minutes before Sasha woke up.

"How long have I been asleep?" Sasha asked. He sat up, yawned, and then ran his fingers through his overgrown beard.

"You'd still be sleeping were it not for me," Peter said. "You'd better get ready to jam. Zhenia and Vasia will be here soon." Zhenia Volkov was *Sinnii Kaif's* bass player and rounded off their blues trio.

As for Vasia, that's me: Vasia Lisov. Ever since Peter and I got expelled from the *Komsomol* — the Young Communist League — when we got caught smoking some wonderful Afghani hash that my brother had brought back from a war that didn't exist, we were the closest of friends. Although I was born without any musical gifts at all, I did have other very useful talents. My friends knew me as the Fox for my ability to procure whatever needed procuring. The local militia referred to me as a *fartsovshchik* — a black marketeer — because they simply had no appreciation for my God-given skills as an entrepreneur and a fixer.

Peter's image, for example, was one of my proudest creations. His Ray Ban wrap-around shades, his Eric Clapton black long-sleeved T-shirt, his black Levis, his engineer boots, and his collection of B.B. King and Johnny Winter tapes were all proof of my skills as a procurer. I could spot a foreigner walking down Leningrad's main street, Nevskii Prospekt, from a kilometer away. A few minutes later after double-checking his shoes (always a dead giveaway) and perhaps asking him what time it was (even Russian-speaking foreigners inevitably stumble over our way

Izvestiia from his back pocket and sat down at the small table in the corner. Without ever bothering to read a word, he tore the *Pravda* into long thin strips. The tearing done, he hung the strips on the little metal hooks next to the filthy seatless toilet. Peter then crumpled up the copy of *Izvestiia* and stuffed it down the legs of his pants. Your American jeans, no matter how nice they may look, just aren't made for our Russian winters. And *Chukotka* was always a mighty cold place even if it was a boiler room.

His preparations done, Peter sat back to enjoy one of his Lucky Strikes (a difficult acquisition in a country where the Marlboro was the preferred medium of exchange). But before he was halfway through his smoke, the pipes started banging. It seemed as if the mysterious inhabitants of Building 39 were getting cold.

"All right, all right," Peter said even though he knew they couldn't hear. "As long as you pretend to pay me, I'll pretend to work."

That said, he walked over to the boiler, tapped the erratic pressure dial that still indicated a full head of steam, and opened the furnace door. Picking up *Chukotka's* only *sovok*, he shoveled enough coal into the boiler to last another few hours.

"Hey, thanks," Sasha said when he saw what Peter was doing.

"No problem," Peter said. "My shift's already started."

And at that point, for now I must insert myself into this tale, I knocked on the door.

"Hey, anybody there?" I asked.

"No one but us *Chukchis*," Peter said and then waited before opening the door. The usual price of admission to *Chukotka* was a new *Chukchi* anecdote. Fortunately, we Russians seem to have an endless supply of them.

"All right. Why are there no *Chukchi* political prisoners?" I asked.

A few minutes after I arrived, Zhenia the bass-guitarist showed up with a couple of friends carrying the band's gear. They all had the same pale and gaunt look that comes from too many late-night cigarettes and bottles of fortified wine.

end of a building at the farthest end of Vasilevskii Island, Peter started calling his place of employment *Chukotka* in honor of that remotest part of the Soviet Union directly across the Bering Strait from your Alaska. The name stuck.

Letting himself in the door, Peter kicked the snow off his black boots and took off his long black coat.

"Hey, Sasha. You here?" Peter said. Sasha Medvedev was *Sinnii Kaif's* drummer. Sasha

of telling time), I would proceed to talk the very shirt off his back (even in the middle of winter) in exchange for some worthless Soviet trinket. Peter's black hair and quiet good looks were all his, but I helped wrap the package.

But let's get back to that fateful day in *Chukotka*. While Sasha pulled on his pants and washed his big, hairy body with the help of the questionable rag at the sink, Peter pulled out the latest copies of *Pravda* and

Peter was quiet for a moment before answering, "I don't know."

"Because it's impossible to exile a *Chukchi* by sending him further east."

Peter laughed. "Well, you could send them across the Bering Straight to Alaska."

"Ah," I said, "but that would be a reward rather than a punishment."

"You win. Welcome to *Chukotka*." And with that, Peter opened the door. "Hey, what're you holding behind your back?"

I smiled as I held up two large bottles of transparent liquid. "Well, I'm not quite sure. We'll have to taste it and see. I got it from my cousin who claims it's the best *samogon*" made on his collective farm. But it's like none I've ever seen."

Samogon' is Russian moonshine. And you're never quite sure what it's going to be made out of: cologne, potatoes, shoe polish, rye, rubbing alcohol, beets, lighter fluid, or dozens of other equally creative ingredients.

Peter looked at it and smiled. "Let's save it

a *sovok*. Whenever I feel nostalgia for our world that was, it's because it's impossible to find true *kaif* anywhere in our brave new Russia. Sure, the word still continues to exist. But there is no way that it can mean the same thing. It's no longer as rare or as unusual as it used to be.

But on that long ago day in *Chukotka*, the *kaif* was there. Peter, Sasha, and Zhenia jammed like men possessed. When Peter put his harmonica to his lips, it wailed like Eurydice lost in the land of the dead. Peter's elec-

tronic guitar was the Orpheus descending into the underworld to claim her back. particular visions but that doesn't really surprise me. After all, I never remember any of my dreams. Zhenia saw flashing lights all through the night that he claimed were UFOs (but then again, we had all heard that before). To this day, Sasha swears that he had an argument with Ringo Starr about drumming techniques. And Peter ... well, what Peter saw was amazing. Because the rest of us saw the same thing as well.

A couple of hours after consuming our cigarettes and moonshine — along with the

When Peter put his harmonica to his lips, it wailed like Eurydice lost in the land of the dead. His electric guitar was the Orpheus descending into the underworld to claim her back.

for after the jam. I play better when I'm sober. Why don't you put it in the refrigerator?"

Now *Chukotka* didn't really have a refrigerator. But I knew what Peter meant. There was a window well in the far corner of the room. Since one of the outer window panes was broken, the space between the outer and inner windows functioned as a refrigerator.

A few minutes after I arrived, Zhenia the bassguitarist showed up with a couple of friends carrying the band's gear. They all had the same pale and gaunt look that comes from too many late-night cigarettes and bottles of fortified wine. Zhenia's father owned an ancient *Moskvich* which was used to drive the band's equipment to *Chukotka* and back. As *Sinnii Kaif* concerts were few and far between, if you wanted to hear the band play your best bet was to get invited out to *Chukotka*.

Now I should probably explain what the band's name means. *Sinnii* is easy: it means blue. Dark blue. Or in Peter's case, the blues, the musical blues. Now the word *kaif* is pure slang so it's almost impossible to translate. It might mean feeling high, achieving bliss, having an epiphany, or even experiencing an orgasm of sorts. But it also meant something very different, something purely Soviet.

You see, even back in the Black Days of the Soviet Union, there were a few perfect moments. There were times when no matter how high the shit was piled up around you — when no matter what else was going wrong in your life, you still managed to achieve a moment of perfection against all the odds. Those treasured moments were known as *kaif*.

Now that the Soviet Union has vanished, I can get as high as I want, have as many orgasms in a night as I can manage, but no matter what I do, I can never quite achieve that same sense of *kaif*. Pleasure just comes too easily these days. You don't have to work at it — earn it — like you did when you were

tronic guitar was the Orpheus descending into the Underworld to claim her back. Orpheus journeyed through a blue hell charming everything within the range of his magic fingers before freeing Eurydice with a long, spectacular jam.

But then, at the very moment when Eurydice had almost been brought back to life and the cries from her harmonica had become those of pleasure rather than of pain, Orpheus looked back and forgot to pluck his strings. And Eurydice was lost forever. A moment later, both the guitar and harmonica let out such heart-rending wails that I thought that time had stopped.

To this day I can still remember that amazing jam. Sasha and Zhenia were hotter than they had ever been, but Peter played like a god. They played and played until Peter blew his amp and the session came to an abrupt end.

Zhenia, who took care of the band's equipment, looked at the blown amp and clucked. "This is not the real misfortune," he said repeating one of his favorite sayings. "The true one is still to come."

Pulling the bottles of chilled moonshine from the refrigerator, I said: "Gentlemen, I think your exquisite playing deserves a little reward." Sasha smacked his lips and went off in search of glasses or their equivalent. Zhenia's two friends pulled out their payment for the concert: a Mason jar of hand-made pickles, two bruised pomegranates, a piece of fatback wrapped in greasy butcher's paper, a half-loaf of rye bread, and four packs of Bulgarian cigarettes. Peter and Zhenia gathered up the chairs, stools, and the two wooden boxes normally used for ice fishing that would serve as our seats. The party was ready to begin.

Now I never did figure out exactly what that moonshine was made from. But I do know that it made everyone see things they had never seen before. I don't remember my

pickles, pomegranates, and fatback to cut the alcohol's unusual taste, our little party broke up. Everybody needed to get home before the metro stopped running and they raised all the bridges to let the icebreakers and barges through. Peter had to stay out at *Chukotka* and work — or at least pretend.

But that night, he was too restless to sleep on the cot. He wandered around the basement playing on his harmonica. When that was not enough to quiet him down, he put on his coat and grabbed one of the wooden ice-fishing boxes and set off for the frozen mouth of the Neva.

Once out on the river, he drilled a hole through the ice. He found a hook and baited it with some of the left-over rye bread. After dropping the fishing line into the water, Peter sat down on the carpeted end of the box to wait. When his hands started getting cold, he pulled out his harmonica and started to blow.

The haunting sound of a blues harmonica floated across the ice. As he played, he caught fish after fish. It seemed that the fish were attracted to the music — he barely needed to bait the hook. In less than an hour, Peter had 11 fish lined up on the ice at different phases of being frozen. The 12th fish that he caught was a small flounder. As he held it up to pull the hook from its mouth, he realized that the fish's scales were gold. In answer to his unspoken question, words began to take shape in Peter's head.

"Yes, I'm the Golden Fish," the fish said. It did not sound very happy.

"So —," Peter said.

"So, if you let me free, I have to grant you a wish."

"Wish —"

"Yes, one wish. What is it that you've always wanted?"

"Love —" Love was the first word that came to Peter's tired lips. They had long since turned blue with cold.

"Love," said the fish. "Well, love it is. And

Many Voices

WRITING TEACHERS SPEAK OF "finding your voice" as if the damned thing were lost somewhere: behind the desk, under the computer, in back of the commode. Whenever I hear that phrase, I am reminded of the "discovery" of America. Columbus did not discover America, he encountered the native people who already lived there. They were not lost, to be found. And neither is the story's voice. The story's voice, not the author's. That is what must be uncovered, not discovered.

Perhaps nowhere can differences in story voice be so readily discernible than in the literature of the fantastic. I thought it might be fun to look at three different fantasy voices telling the same story — well sort of the same story. After all, hearing is believing! The story is called "The Barbarian Takes Tea with the Queen."

The **Bardic voice**: Used in High Fantasy, where the battles of good and evil rage across the pages, where Elfland meets the Wild Hunt. This is also the oracular voice, the poet's bardic voice with frequent use of metaphor, or as John Ciardi called them, "exactly felt errors." The bardic voice is full of alliteration, hyperbole. Sentences often end in a full stop, the strong stress syllable that reminds the reader of the tolling of a great bell. Characters thunder, gestures are large, emotions heightened.

However, the bardic voice does not just use big words and overblown expressions. It is only generic writing that tries to get away with catch phrases and no visual details. Failing to understand the connection between a level of detail and vision means the writer has not yet uncovered that particular voice. What is needed is to have two visions: one has to do with what is beyond and above — soul, theme, heart, subtext — and the other with muffin specificity. The danger is in overdoing, overstating, and making everyone look foolish.

The Barbarian Takes Tea with the Queen. He sat on the edge of his chair, that mightily-thewed barbarian, uneasy with the soft cushion at the back, for his people always said that "Comfort is the enemy of the warrior."

He clutched the porcelain cup in one of his death grips. It was only by chance that he did not break the cup and spill the tea — a special blend of Angoran and Baslien leaves flavored with tasmairn seeds — down the front of his leather pants. They were his best leather trews, sewn by his favorite wife. He did not want to stain them.

Let's move quickly to another voice, the **Schoolboy Voice**. Set securely in the here-and-now (or the historical here-and-now) the

Schoolboy Voice is a sensible, childlike — though not childish — unabashedly innocent commentary on the fantastic swirling about it. Language tends to be plainer and explanations are often offered with a kind of wink to the reader. There are fewer descriptions of clothing, lots more of food. As you can guess, this voice is mostly used in children's books.

Of course there is a danger with this particular voice, the danger of sentimentality, the *Velveteen Rabbit* syndrome. The line between sentiment and sentimentality in the Schoolboy Voice can be crossed too easily.

Let's try that Barbarian with his teacup again and see how different the same basic premise can sound:

Prince Henry sat next to his mother and stared at the barbarian who teetered on the edge of his seat, one enormous hairy hand clutching a teacup.

"Excuse me," Prince Henry said, "but why don't you lean back in the chair? You look terribly uncomfortable."

The barbarian grunted, a sound quite like the sound Prince Henry's prize pig made in labor. "Comfortable warrior," he said in his grunt voice, "is dead warrior."

"Yes, of course. But no one is actually trying to kill you here," Prince Henry said sensibly.

"He means," his mother put in tactfully, "that he must at all times be on his guard so as not to get into bad habits. And Henry, you do know about bad habits, don't you? She smiled and poured some of the tasmairn-laced tea into the cup, never showing for a moment that she feared the barbarian might crush the cup — one of an important set sent to her by her godmother, the Sultana.

Prince Henry was too young to be impressed with his mother's calm. But he knew better than to say anything more. Bad habits was a subject best left unexplored.

The third voice I call **Josephus**, after the father of historical writers who seemed to get fact and fantasy, rumor and reality, quite mixed up. Alternate history and historical fantasy require a voice that sounds reasonable yet sings, a convincing voice that never winks or hesitates when the fantastic walks onto the scene. Getting this voice right takes conviction, convincing detail, and knowledge of the period.

Get the facts right, and the fancies follow.

Queen Victoria stared over her teacup at her new Prime Minister. Her nose twitched but she did not sniff at him. It would not do. He was the barbarian, not she. All Jews were barbarians. Eastern, oily, brilliant, full of dark magic. However long they lived in England, they remained different. She did

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REALMS OF FANTASY

VOLUME 4

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love she will be. But you'll have to make her out of snow. I don't see any other choice. And if you ever love anyone or anything more than you love her, you'll lose her. Understood?"

Peter could only nod.

"Well, don't just stand there nodding," the fish said. "Put me back in the water before I suffocate."

Peter did as he was told, wondering if he had imagined the whole thing. But seeing a convenient snowdrift right nearby, he set about molding the woman of his dreams out of snow. After what seemed like only a few minutes, she looked like one of the marble statues in *Letnii Sad* — one of the ones who hadn't lost her arms or face. And Peter's snow maiden was just as lifeless.

To warm his now-freezing hands, Peter jammed them into his coat pocket and found

"Thanks," she said. "I've been gone for I don't know how long. You can't imagine how hungry I was." She smiled. "Peter, why are you looking at me so strangely?"

"Are-aren't you cold?"

Liuba looked down at her perfect but naked body. "No. It doesn't seem cold to me."

"Uh ... we can't have you walking around here like that," Peter said taking off his long black coat. "Here, put this on and we can go back to *Chukotka* and figure out what to do next."

Well, they went back to *Chukotka* and it didn't take them long to figure out what to do next. When Peter was as naked as Liuba and the cot moved as far away from the boiler as possible (it was too warm there for Liuba), they kissed as if they had been waiting for that moment all their lives. Peter shiv-

enough."

"Yeah, I mean no. I need some women's clothes."

"Women's clothes."

"Yeah, women's clothes." Pause.

"Hey, Vasia. You still there?"

"I'm still here."

"Listen, it's a long story. When you come out to *Chukotka*, I'll explain everything to you."

"You will."

"Yeah, yeah. I will. Don't worry. Listen, last night I found a woman out on the ice."

"You found a woman out on the ice."

"Yeah, on the ice. And she didn't — doesn't — have any clothes."

"No clothes."

"Exactly. That's why I need some women's clothes. For her. For Liuba."

"Liuba."

Peter pulled the harmonica from his bleeding lips and opened his eyes. In front of him stood the most beautiful woman that he had ever seen or would ever see.

his harmonica. Inspired, he pulled it out, closed his eyes, and started playing Orpheus and Eurydice's song.

Although a story is quickly told, a deed takes time to do. But this time Orpheus never looked back. He brought his love all the way to the land of the living. Exhausted from playing like he had never played before, Peter pulled the harmonica from his bleeding lips and opened his eyes. In front of him stood the most beautiful woman that he had ever seen or would ever see.

"Wha-what's your name?" Peter asked. Nothing else came to mind.

The woman seemed to think for a moment before answering, "Liuba. Yes, Liuba. And who are you?"

"Pyo-Peter."

"Well, Peter," Liuba said with a smile that wrenched his guts. "I'm starving. Do you have anything to eat?"

Peter shook his head but then remembered the rye bread in his coat pocket. He pulled it out, but Liuba had already seen the frozen fish.

"Could I have some of your fish?"

Peter rushed to pry the frozen fish off the ice. "We can go back to *Chukotka* ... to the place I work ... and cook them up if you like."

"Oh, no. No need to go to all that bother," Liuba said. She took one of the offered fish and ate it from head to tail without batting an eye. Peter passed her fish after fish and she crunched them down one right after the other. Peter was charmed. When she finished the 11th one, she looked at Peter with love in her eyes.

ered as the goosebumps spread across his skin like a wildfire.

When he finally entered her, his entire body shuddered with delight. Every single one of his cells tingled with that unbelievable sensation that you get when you jump naked through a hole in the ice after a long hot *bania*. As you scramble out of the frigid water and run barefoot through the snow back to the *bania's* steaming warmth, your whole body turns bright pink. And when you beat it with the waiting birch branches, your skin flares bright red in an almost unbearable agony of pleasure. Peter said that making love to Liuba was even better than that: It was full-body *kaif*.

That first night together they kept at it for as long as they could stand it. They would stop from time to time while Peter huddled around the boiler and Liuba ran outside. By the time they were through, Peter's skin had gone from bright red to blue. When I saw him the next evening, I would have guessed that the militia had beaten him within an inch of his life if it weren't for his smile. He looked like he had swallowed Alice's Cheshire Cat. But I'm getting a bit ahead of myself.

I woke up late that same day with a nasty hangover. As I headed out to ply my trade on Nevskii Prospekt and the other famous sites of our city frequented by tourists, I got a call from Peter from a pay phone that barely worked. As I recall, our conversation went something like this:

"Vasia. I need some clothes."

"So the new Clapton T-shirt wasn't

"Liuba. That's her name. Come on. Just get her some clothes and come on out here."

"Well, what does she look like?"

"Oh, Vasia. You won't believe her. You've never seen anyone like her. She —"

"I don't care how beautiful she is. What does she look like? I mean, who does she look like? I'll need to get her something that fits."

Pause.

"You remember Masha from the *Komсомол*?"

"Boy, do I remember Masha from the *Komсомол*. That snitch. So you're saying she's Masha's size and shape?"

"Yeah. More or less."

"I hope less rather than more. All right. I'll see what I can do."

"Oh — and Vasia?"

"Yes."

"Get her something nice. I'll pay you back. I promise."

"Something nice."

"Yeah, nice. Something in black."

"Black. What a surprise. I would never have guessed. Any other special requests while I'm at it?"

"No, I think that's it." And he hung up without even saying good-bye.

When I was presented with a challenge like this, my skills would go into overdrive. I found a lovely French blacklace bra and matching panties at the *Beriozka* hard-currency store on Nevskii. (Tanya, one of the lovely *Beriozka* girls whom I'd been courting for months, was very helpful. She even recommended a nice perfume.) I got the black blouse and leather vest combination from a

German tourist near the statue of Peter the Great. Granted, she had to go back to her hotel room in the Astoria to change first, but she was more than willing to do it for the little icon I gave her. The long skirt came from an American whom I had been cultivating — a student at Leningrad State University. I caught her as she returned from her classes to Dorm Six. All she wanted for it was money (it was cheaper than buying your rubles at the official rate). Black stockings and a make-up kit were no problem as I always had them in stock.

But the winter boots ... the boots were a big problem and a bigger risk. I had to go to the Boss himself. Fortunately, the Boss was in. His Firebird (the only one in all of Leningrad — or all of the Soviet Union for that matter) was parked right in front of his apartment. His bright red American car stood out so much among all of our boring Soviet *Moskviches*, *Ladas*, and *Volgas* that I used to wonder rather naively how come the militia picked on me and never bothered the obvious King of the Black Marketeers. Later, when I was a little older and wiser, I realized that both the Boss and the militia ultimately have the same employers. Anyway, the Boss had the boots I wanted — lovely, long

usual price of admission (which was a good thing as I hadn't thought to bring a new *Chukchi* anecdote).

It was then that I saw Liuba for the first time. She was dressed in all the fine black clothes that I had just gone to so much trouble to procure. And let me tell you: they fit her perfectly. When she smiled at me, holding those 11 white roses in her hands, I realized that I would have made any deal with not just the Boss but the Devil himself to make her happy.

"Uh ... Vasia, this is Liuba," Peter said. He stood around looking uncomfortable, not knowing what to do with his hands.

"Hi, Liuba."

"Thank you for the flowers, Vasia. And the clothes. They're beautiful. I feel like you should be my fairy godfather. See, Peter, everything always looks better in the evening." She spun around, her skirt twirling in the air.

My heart melted right then and there. Liuba had skin as white as untouched snow. It looked as delicate as the Tsar's finest bone china that you can only see in the Hermitage. Her eyes were blue like the Gulf of Finland in the summer. And her hair, her hair was as black as a winter night. As she stood there

just two tiny rooms in a larger communal apartment that he shared with his parents and his grandmother (maybe one day I'll tell you the story of how my ex-wife Tanya and I were forced to share the same apartment for four years *after* our divorce, but I wouldn't want to ruin the mood). I could tell you how Peter and Liuba would go out icefishing whenever she was hungry. Peter would summon the fish with his harmonica. I could tell you how Peter and Liuba conquered Leningrad's underground scene. They were the royal couple, the talk of the Cafe Saigon, invited to every important party and event. During those Black Days of Winter, their love glowed with a light of its own. I could tell you so much but I think you can figure most of it out for yourself.

But the part I have to tell you about is that with Liuba around, Peter almost forgot about his music. *Sinnii Kaif's* jam sessions became few and far between. Sasha and Zhenia, pacing around *Chukotka* like caged animals, urged Peter to work on their new album. But Peter just didn't have the time, energy, or inclination. Instead, he preferred to play for Liuba while they were out fishing on the ice. While I missed the music, to be honest, I didn't mind. I had never seen Peter happier

When she smiled at me, holding those eleven white roses in her hands, I realized that I would have made any deal with not just the Boss but the Devil himself to make her happy.

leather boots in what I hoped would be the right size. In exchange, I had to promise a dozen different things including booking a series of *Sinnii Kaif* concerts at the Boss' new club next spring.

Once I had packed all my trophies into my Adidas bag, I stopped by the Moscow Train Station to pick up some flowers for Liuba. While Peter's intentions were always good, he often failed when it came to the most basic elements of execution. I picked out 11 of the biggest white roses that I could find (in Russia it's considered unlucky to give someone an even number of flowers) and I was ready to roll. I flagged down a gypsy cab (every vehicle in the Soviet Union was a potential taxi for the right price) and I was on my way. While sitting in the paramedic's seat in the back of a suddenly off-duty ambulance whose sheets are still covered with spots of wet blood may not be the ideal way to travel, with the help of the siren we made it out to remotest *Chukotka* in record time.

Now I've already told you how I found Peter: in a true blue *kaif*. He opened the door, grabbed my bag without a word, and then slammed the door shut in my face. Ten minutes later he opened the door again and let me in without even asking for the

next to Peter, I realized that they were the perfect couple.

"Damn, I forgot to get you a coat." My heart sank. I seldom forget things. Especially obvious things.

"A coat's the one thing I don't need."

"Uh ... why don't we have some tea?" Peter said changing the subject and motioning me over to the table. "The water's boiling." So we sat down to drink some tea. Actually, only Peter and I had any tea. Liuba sucked on some icicles that Peter had pulled off the side of Building 39 for her.

As we sipped our tea, Peter told me the whole story, as he had promised over the phone. Each time I stopped to wonder if something could have really happened the way Peter described it, I would look into Liuba's deep blue eyes. She would smile in response and all my doubts would vanish.

NOW, I COULD GO ON FOR HOURS RELATING every detail of Peter and Liuba's fairy-tale love. I could tell you how Peter moved into *Chukotka* on a permanent basis refusing to allow Sasha and his other co-workers to even come to work. You see, Soviet housing problems were such that Peter's real home was

— or anyone else as happy for that matter. Peter had achieved a kind of perpetual *kaif*. And it infected even me.

EVERYTHING CONTINUED WITHOUT A change until the spring. As the ice on the Neva started thawing (you could hear the thunderous cracks even as far away as *Chukotka*), both Peter and Liuba got restless. And because spring came so late, I had almost forgotten about the promise I had made to the Boss. He, of course, remembered. He drove up to me in his Firebird as I was trying to fleece some Japanese tourists near St. Isaac's Cathedral and called in his debt. Peter was thrilled to get the chance to perform in front of a larger audience and invited Zhenia and Sasha out to *Chukotka* for several practice sessions.

As it turned out, Liuba could sing. But she was no Janis Joplin who could belt out those blues. She was more of a bluesy Astrid Gilberto. She had an unusual almost unmusical voice that managed to charm you in spite of itself. And since she only sang a couple of songs in the set, it left you wanting to hear more. Zhenia and Sasha didn't mind the

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*Curiosity killed the cat" is a familiar theme in folk tales.
But will curiosity kill the wolf?*

The Wolf Man's Wife

BY PENI R. GRIFFIN

Illustration by Janet Aulisio

*It happened one time that a poor woman became poorer, until
she didn't know what to do. So she went to the tree of the
Live Oak woman and knocked three times, calling:*

"In the name of your sister, my mother, come out and advise me."

The Live Oak Woman came out, her eyes hard and brown as acorns and her hair scattering and yellow, for it was spring and the live oak leaves were falling. "My sister was a silly woman. Why should I help the daughter she didn't provide for?"

"She did provide for me," said the woman, "but now she is dead, and I have lost the land that made our living, through caring more for hungry faces than for money. I've brought you all the goods I canned last year, and the new radishes."

"Well," said the Live Oak Woman, looking over the offerings, "It's true that there's no abiding by men's law. Take all your seeds and wait by the Hunter's Road for the opportunity that will come to you; but take care you don't spoil your own chances, as your mother did."

So the woman mended her stockings by the Hunter's Road while people passed to and fro. Those who knew her, knew her misfortune also, and passed by on the other side of the road; and those who didn't know her were rough men, who spoke roughly, and got no answer.

At last a hunter came by, who had often bought from her in the market. He was a tall, lean man, with shaggy hair and long ears; and he alone of all the passersby stopped and spoke decently to her. "I looked for you in the market today," he said, "but couldn't find you; and the other gardeners charged so much, I can bring hardly anything home."

"I am sorry for that," said the woman, and told him how it was, but did not mention the Live Oak Woman. "So I am mending my stockings before I set off to seek my fortune."

He frowned, and looked at the air, and looked at the ground, and looked at her. "It is a long, hard road to fortune," he said.

"Perhaps you would come be my wife, instead."

She looked at him, and looked at the sky, and looked at him again; and she said:

"All right."

So that same day they were married, and walked down the Hunter's Road till they came to a track. They walked down this track till they came to a path; and they walked down this path till they came to a house of stone and mud, with a crooked smokeless chimney, and not another building in sight. The hunter looked at his feet and said: "This is our home."

The woman walked around the house, until she found a well rising fresh and pure from a tall limestone rock. She laid down her seeds and said: "In the morning I will break ground for my garden. There is no time to lose."

They went in together, and each was happy with the bargain that night. But, in the small hours of the morning, the woman woke to hear a sniffing and a scratching round the house. She peeped out the shutter, and almost screamed; for the little house was surrounded by enormous wolves!

"Don't be afraid," said her husband, behind her. "There are many wolves here, but they have never harmed me. I will show you." He opened the door wide, and went out among them. The woman watched with her heart in her mouth as they pressed about him; but he walked up to a great black wolf with yellow eyes, and crouched down to his level as he might have to a child, making low, soft wolf-sounds. The black wolf licked his face, shook himself, and loped away, the lesser wolves following him. The hunter came inside, and closed the door. "You see?" he smiled. "We have nothing to fear."

The woman sat down on the bed. She should have known that the Live Oak Woman would not have sent her to any common man. "Then I will fear nothing," she said, "and if I tremble now and then, you must remember that I know more of beets than beasts."

"That is well," said the hunter. "Let us make a bargain. I will never interfere in what you grow or what you sell or when you work; and you must have the same courtesy for me. My habits may seem strange to you, for I hunt by night and must make up my sleep when I can; but leave me to them, and we will live well."

"This suits me," said the woman, "but we ought to learn each other's trades, in case of illness or accident."

He frowned, and spoke slowly: "I will learn what you think I should know; and I will teach you to cure skins and prepare meat; but it is better if you stay indoors at night. Promise me that you will never leave the house, or open door or window, between dark and dawn, else I will live in fear for you."

The woman thought of all those wolves, and promised.

Next morning she broke ground for her garden, and her husband helped her; though he was apt to lie down suddenly and take a nap, then wake and resume work as if nothing had happened. In the evening, as the sun went down, he said to her: "Now, I am going hunting. Remember you must shut door and window tight behind me, and open neither till dawn."

"I remember," said the woman.

"There is a trick to that shutter. Show me you know how to fasten it well."

She turned around and showed him. As she turned back she saw him close up a cupboard, and put something into the bag she had filled with food for him; but she kissed him goodbye and wished him good hunting, before she thought to wonder what it had been. She looked in the cupboard, but it was empty of all but dust. So she dusted it, and went to bed.

When she woke, the hunter lay beside her, and his night's catch hung in the rafters.

The year went round. The woman learned to cure skins, and the hunter learned to tell a weed from a carrot. When they had more than they could use, they went to market and turned meat and vegetables into flour, salt, and cloth. They built a second room. The well gave water even when the land was harsh with drought; and if their money was all copper, at least it was all theirs, owed to no man. The woman was happy, but some things she could not help noticing.

The hunter left each evening, but he never again took anything from that cupboard; nor did he take anything at all, no knife or bow or snare. He brought home many small beasts, rabbit, quail, and ground squirrel; but he never brought home more than a quarter of a deer or any other large beast. And the skins she cured were never, ever perfect. They had been torn in the killing, and she was fortunate if they had been torn only in the throat. She asked no questions, but she wondered; and sometimes, when she could not sleep for wondering, she would hear the wolf pack sniffing round the house.

One spring night she could not sleep; and when the stripes of the shutters showed upon the floor with the first paling of dawn, she rose and built up the fire for breakfast. It was in her mind to buy chickens next time they went to market, that she might taste eggs again. Having thought of eggs, she could think of nothing else; and she thought maybe she could find a few nests somewhere that could spare one or two apiece for breakfast. The sun was not yet up, but would be soon; and she thought it not too early to be out under the terms of her promise.

So the woman set out on the path by which her husband set out each night, with her basket over her arm. She did not stray far from it, but birds do not nest in paths. She was picking her way through the scrub when she saw a wolf padding swiftly along her hus-

band's trail.

It was a huge, shaggy wolf, with bright, hungry eyes; and though he carried a ground squirrel and would likely be as scared of her as she was of him, she did not care to meet him. The woman sat behind a creosote bush, and waited for him to pass; but he did not pass. When he came to the stump of a blasted live oak, he stopped, laid down the squirrel, yawned, and took off his pelt. There stood her husband, naked as a skinned squirrel! He put the pelt into the stump, took out his clothes and a string of game, and added the ground squirrel to it. "Not a bad catch," he said aloud, "but I'm late, and my wife will have breakfast on the stove." So he dressed and hurried whistling down the path.

The woman sat trembling for a long time. The longer she thought, the less she was surprised. This explained everything strange about her husband; even the partial deer that he brought home, for it takes not one wolf, but a pack, to bring large game down, and he would not be able to claim all of the kill. "He has been a good and tender husband," she told herself. "What is to fear, except that he will learn that I have spied on him, and not trust me anymore?" So she shook herself, and made herself sing as she walked home.

Her husband met her at the door. "Where have you been? Didn't you promise me not to leave the house?"

"The sky was gray with dawn, and I wanted eggs," she said, kissing him as if it were any other morning. "I am sorry to have worried you, but now we will eat well."

"Did you see nothing to surprise or frighten you?" he asked.

"I saw a wolf trotting down the path," she said, "but I lay low, and saw no more of him."

So they went on as before; but the woman often lay awake, when the wolves sniffed around her door. She wondered if he would know her if she met him as a wolf. And what would happen if, on any night, she failed to close the shutter properly?

Not long after, she had a child; a bright-eyed girl without a flaw. The hunter thought her the most perfect creature ever known to man or nature, and the woman was of the same mind. During the day, between his naps, they worked harder than ever, and played with her, and planned how she would be the greatest beauty in the land, lacking nothing.

These days were the happiest the woman had ever spent; but always night came, and her husband kissed her and the baby before he strode whistling into the dusk, to become a beast. And those nights were the worst she had ever spent. What if, someday, somehow, he looked into the cradle as a wolf? What if, someday, the baby sprouted wolfskin? What if — what if — what if —

At last one autumn morning, as the nights grew longer, the woman could bear it no more. Her husband came whistling home for breakfast, bearing two rabbits and a portion

At the darkest hour of night, she stumbled unseeing against her own door. The rain had died, and thunder growled far away, but the howling was near which shadows might be wolves, and which storm-blowing scrub, she could not tell.

of a deer, and when these were hung up, and breakfast down him, he curled on the bed to sleep. The baby slept, milkful, in her cradle. "It is not far," the woman said to herself. "I will just go look at it."

So she went down the path till she came to the stump, and drew out the wolf skin. It was matted, stained with blood, and stank. She could not bear to handle it, or think of it enclosing her husband's dear body. So she dropped it back in, gathered up dry grass and twigs, and set the stump afire.

The flames danced in the sun.

She heard her husband scream "No! No!" as he ran toward her. "Put it out! Oh, put it out!" He fell to the ground, writhing and screaming.

The woman hurried to beat out the flames, but the fire had taken hold. Soon the stump was mere charcoal, and the wolfskin destroyed. Her husband moaned, with his hands over his face. She went to him. "Oh, my love, my love, I didn't mean to hurt you!"

He snarled and ran away on all fours through the brush.

Then she knew that her life, his life, and the baby's life, were spoiled through her fault. She gathered her baby on her arm and went down the path to the track, the track to Hunter's Road, Hunter's Road to the Live Oak Woman.

Here she knocked three times, calling: "In the name of my daughter, your great-niece, come out and advise me!"

The Live Oak Woman came out, with her eyes hard and brown as acorns, and her hair dull green with the autumn. "You are as silly a woman as your mother! Why should I advise you?"

"Not for my sake," said the woman, "and if you turn me away, I will hold you blameless. But this child is innocent of all wrong and all stupidity. Will you not care for her, till I can put right that which I put wrong?"

"How do you intend to do that?" asked the Live Oak Woman.

"I do not know, but if I never return, you will know I have not done it."

The Live Oak Woman looked at the baby, and looked at the sky, and looked at the baby again. "Very well," she said, taking the child. "I will look after her, but I've no mind to be saddled with her all her life, so I will advise you. Bring him to that limestone well, that has so often served you, and dip him in it three times, and you will be served again."

"Easy to say, bring him to it," sighed the woman.

"Did you think foolishness as great as yours could be cured by a word and a tear?" snapped the Live Oak Woman.

So the woman returned to her home to gather up all she might need in the wilderness. She pulled the last vegetables and laid them in the well to keep, swept out the house, and closed doors and shutters firmly. Then she set out into the scrub to find her husband. All she carried with her was a knife and the fire pot, and she kept the charcoal alight in it with care.

Three days and three nights she went through the scrub. Sometimes she heard wolves howling, and sometimes she found some scrap of clothing her husband had been wearing, caught upon a thorn. On the dawn of the fourth day, she found the pack; but they scented her, and ran away, so it was all to do again. She learned to track their spoor, walking so that the wind came from them to her. She learned the limits of the pack's territory, and the patterns of their hunting. She learned to live hungry, eating what she could find; and she learned to step as quietly as any wild thing.

Often she saw her husband among the wolves. The thorns and rocks had torn all the clothes from his body, and his hands and knees were sore and scabby from running upon them. He was the least among the wolves, and her heart ached to see them snap at him, and take food out of his mouth when there was not enough for all. Yet when she came near, he threw back his head and howled; and the wolves made a wall between the two, through which she dared not pass.

She made a rope of bear grass, and taught herself to use it, catching first stumps and rocks in its loop, then small game. One day she caught a deer by lying in a tree above a water hole, and snaring it. She ate what she needed of it, cooking over a tiny fire, and took the remainder to a high rock, where the wolves found and devoured it.

It was winter now, and she wept to see her husband, thin and shivering among the thick-coated wolves. Surely the first hard frost would kill him! Each morning and evening, the pack came to drink at the water hole, the big black leader first, then the others, then finally her husband, shivering, when the clear water was fouled by many lapping tongues and splashing feet. She lay in her tree with the rope tied tight around it, and the loop in her hand. All around the grass was dry and dormant, though clouds hung heavy in the air, and thunder rolled somewhere. She made a line of dry grass between the tree and the water hole, and held her iron pot with care.

In the early winter dusk the pack came to drink, her husband limping last of all. When he passed below her, she cast her loop, and

caught him round his neck. As he cried out, she cast a coal out of her pot, and the line of grass turned to flame between her husband and the wolves.

She dropped to him as he struggled, pulling against the rope till she feared he would choke himself. She bound his hands and feet and loosed the rope about his neck. The pack howled as the fire spread. It was a horrible thing that she had done, setting the brush to burn; but she hoped the coming storm would stop it, and she knew not what else to do. Her husband ceased to struggle and lay panting, watching her with blank, terrified eyes as she carried him away.

He was dead weight, and she had to drag him as often as she carried him, taking off her skirt and petticoat to pull him on. The wind rose, pushing in her face. The wolves howled. She was not more than halfway home when the rain poured down, icy cold, but not sleet yet. In between thunder she heard the wolves howl closer.

"They will not have you back," she panted as she dragged her husband onto his old path. "You are mine, and our child's, and we won't let you go!" Her husband shivered and whined. She toiled on, eyes closed against the rain.

At the darkest hour of night, she stumbled unseeing against her own door. The rain had died, and thunder growled far away, but the howling was near. Which shadows might be wolves, and which storm-blowing scrub, she could not tell. "Not far now," she told her husband, and dragged him to the well.

With an effort that nearly tore her muscles from her arms she hoisted him onto the rock. The huge black wolf leaped onto the rock above her, his eyes bright and his teeth brighter. "You won't have him!" she cried, shoving her husband into the water.

The lead wolf growled. Below her, her husband splashed, jerking at the loop of rope tied around her wrist. She hauled him back up, hand over hand. "The Live Oak Woman is my aunt," she said, not taking her eyes from the eyes of the lead wolf. "The Wolf Man is my husband, and you are nothing to me. Get you gone!" Her husband gaped in her face, gasping for breath and struggling once more. She shoved him in, water splashing round her cold as rain.

The lead wolf bent his head to look into her face, hunching his shoulders and hindquarters, as if he would spring.

"He's not yours!" cried the woman, hauling her husband up. "Leave us be!" She shoved him in for the last time, and began at once to haul him out again.

Continued in Page 95



A. Lumsford. 57

They say if you remember the 60s, you weren't really there.

Well, maybe you weren't.

Meadow Song

BY WILLIAM R. EAKIN
Illustration by Annie Lunsford

I have wished for you from these silent meadows.

I have forgotten how many years. But you have never really left, because as long as I am alive, Laura, this is your place, and the mists knotting themselves like rope through the woods are yours, and I see your footsteps still on the road where the deer walk and the sun sets across the fence, the one you helped build; the cornflowers and the spiked purple clover and the bluebells are just as they were when Harriet picked them for you, when she lived here, too. And I have not thought of you as that old woman I would not take to the nursing home until I simply had to. I think of you as that flowery-dressed mother holding Harriet's wildflowers in a bean can. The Childers place has been drawn and quartered, literally, Laura, into four 100 – acre plots, and the Warren boy is out here developing the section next to us into a tract neighborhood of sorts; I can imagine you putting on your boots with that fury only you can possess and running over there before the sun comes up every morning to pull those stakes out. I would do it, except my legs don't move fast enough to get me out of the field before the bulldozers come. Anyway I think of you from our silent meadows, and they are just as they were, and the flowers raise up their heads in the same spring order, and the summers are as hot, and a misty morning is as much appreciated, and I walk and look for intimations of deer and drink a cup of coffee, just as we did. And this morning I wanted to tell you that — it's very hard for me to talk to you sometimes, you know, without getting choked up — that I hadn't done a single water-witchin' since that 80-footer over at Bob Callahan's, and I still gotta pay land tax, and I know it won't be much longer before Harriet and that new husband of hers drive out to say they think maybe I'm doin' too much stuff anyway, like putting Vaporub instead of butter on my

toast, and that they think a run-down mobile home out here at the far edge of the meadow is just too damn much of a fire hazard for me to be cooking, since I don't know how to use the galdarned microwave. And if I can't afford to stay, well ... So you see, Laura, things are comin' to a head, and a man has to do what he must.

You remember that the Beergoozers had their first hit in '63: We were kids and caught up with that special sound, and do you remember sitting together in the pick-up I was too young to drive, singin' "Surfin', Surfin' Mamacita —" And do you remember that white silky room of yours with the canopy bed that looked so prim and proper in your Daddy's house except that you'd taped the 8-by-10 photos of those four boys across the mirror? And even though we were nearly 20 by the time they put out the album cover with them naked as jay birds, we giggled together about it. God, weren't we kids? I grew up with you, Laura, and I really haven't learned how to live without you, not even after all these years, and this thing with the Beergoozers is something I believe you would find — interesting. And perhaps a little nostalgic. 'Cause ain't it sad that those boys have to come back on stage with their silly bald heads and their creaky legs and their arthritic fingers trying to pluck out those same damned guitar licks they played when they were teen-wonders; HBO or some one of those cable television stations put 'em up to their Fortieth Anniversary Reunion Concert and there'll be a CD, when they really should be sucking on mother's milk or Ensure in some set of wheelchairs overlookin' Malibu Beach. And Redgunk is their home, you know, and they ain't played Redgunk, Mississippi, since they did that fundraiser for the Consolidated Schools of Blake County and fried the high-tension lines all the way down to Cornstuff. And none of the damned kids who are comin' to this thing even know their names. But we do, don't we? Indelibly printed in our souls: And I remember now the things I'd forgotten as I turned into a man, that it was more than just music, it was magic, that their music turned me into something new, and Daddy never understood how someone in his 20s could spend so much money on an 8-track collection, since in all Daddy's life, music was just sort of a background to his own activity, whistling *I was Waltzin' with my Darlin'* while he cleaned the carbon off every spark plug he had in the tool shed with that oily rag that must have been stitched to his fingers, but for us it was the fabric from which we grew. We understood the words even when we misquoted them, horrendous lyrics to an old man, but like Divine Writ to a young one — we grew into the music together; we made love in that white, silky room to it: Do you remember?

**Does music
like time swirl
in some Ionic curl?
I think of us standing
on the ridge,
watching the mists curl
up off the morning lake.
Does music do that really?**

*Love me now forever
Take my foolish hand
We'll go off like fireworks
As we walk along the strand*

*It's a lovely beach hotel
Where we've learned to love so well
And I never will forget
the night we learned to pet,
the night we learned to pet.*

I still can't figure how those boys learned to sound so damned English. And I hear that stupid song now; I hear it even as I see these deer there at the woods' edge. And my coffee is finished. And I wish again for that touch of yours, the touch I first felt there in that sweet white room, and last felt as your fingers wandered my face wondering who I was. And I wish again for you, Laura, from these silent meadows. I wish again for you.

Come on out and listen, Pops," says this girl who can't be old enough to menstruate much less be here for three days of free love and LSD, surely. She's bobbing up and down on the wooden stairway I recently re-boarded and I am hoping she does not break through. I think she is somehow tied to the fellow who's producing this thing — at least, she looks familiar, so I must have seen her sometime before the festival.

"I'm waitin' til the Beergoozers come out —" I tell her. I'm tryin' my best to down this strangely gummy piece of toast.

"They ain't showin' up for three days, Pops. They're the Dinosaur Exhibit."

The Dinosaur —

"In the meantime come out and experience what the kids today are listenin' to."

"I can hear it through the —" I point to the mobile home walls, a number of which are now not much more than plaster and masking tape. Right this minute there is a Norwegian Heavy Death Metal band on the stage down at the very back part of the front meadow. I look out the window. And I do not see the meadow. I see a sea of heads and body parts, and mud. This is the first day in and the meadow is already nothing but mud. Oh, shit. Oh, God, Laura. Sorry. Sorry about trampled wildflowers and the scattered deer no doubt too smart and certainly too willied to come up too close to a three-day rock festival.

*I am gonna die,
You are gonna die,
We are gonna die together;
Come and eat rocks now
Yes let's eat rocks now
Let's break up rocks now — together.*

Funny — that's — "Those are Beergoozer lyrics, when they were in their — transitional phase, before the breakup." The *Christmas Carols for Brain-Damaged Guys* album. The music is different, but not much — after all, it was the importation of Beergoozer music into Norway that first got things started there.

"That's the big number one hit on the radio right now, Pops. But that's Jeff Kronos and the Bruise."

My God, do things really come full circle? Like a garden, like the spring flowers, does music do that, too? Does music like time swirl in some Ionic curl? I think of us standing on the ridge, watching the mists curl up off the morning lake. Does music do that really? Laura, I wish for you again, I wish you would come back, too, like an angel swirling down into this phenomenal world, riding the mists and that wild colorful torrent of musical notes I'm sure some of these kids can see in the air right now, given the acid they've

**I literally feel the blood pumping
in my body, circulating, living inside me.
It cycles round and round with each bass
punch-punch-punch! And
the girl has yelled
"Yahooo" at the wild
tops of her
unbridled lungs and
I feel the electric
excitement of a guitar lick
or some drumbeat or
maybe just the massive
crowd standing and whooping
and calling for more songs!**

been passing back and forth. I imagine you, not in your wheelchair — that old woman was a seed — but you, coming back in your flowery dress like a Florentine painting, and the flowers of the meadow in your hand and wild popping colors streaking from them as you move across the sky. Do things move in full circles?

"Pops, you okay — ?"

"Sure, sure, just listening to the music."

"Come out here so you can really hear it." I notice her eyes are dilated as hell. That's okay, my cataracts make the world into blurry rainbows anyway. Maybe we're seeing the same things.

She is excited, though, like a kid, and I am tired. And I tell her: "Don't grab my arm sweetie, I can get myself down the steps — and you're gonna spill my coffee."

"Sorry, Pops, I know how important your coffee is. But come on, come on. There's lots of exciting things to see and lots of people, really cool people, people you will want to be with. This is it!"

I am at the bottom of the steps, and I look over across the fields: There are big mounds of flesh where some of them have spent the night without cover waiting for the festival to begin, and here and there are tents, makeshift stores and homes, makeshift town. I listen and the music now seems muffled and I close my eyes and imagine deer in the misty meadow's edge of just last week and hear a Beergoozer tune down someplace deep in my gray brain matter, but played like a string quartet. And I tell this girl, "Look, I need some — some quiet time. Maybe later — " I start to walk, only I walk the other way, toward the woods. And she shrugs and is gone.

I walk past the mounds of shale where once there was a dry stone wall — your stone wall — and down into the trees. And it is hard to walk over the stones and moss, but I move slowly and carefully and am in the depths of the forest. And I am thankful for my momentary bout of deafness, that I can only feel in my stomach the not-so-distant punch-punch-punching of the bass parts of that death metal group's version of Beergoozer tunes. I am thankful for the trees. They have a silence in them that is strong and long-lived. It is the silence a man can possess if he listens, if he has felt the melancholy of life and is ready to just listen.

"Hey, Pops, you gonna mope around by yourself all day?" It is the girl again, with a tie-dyed bandanna around her hair. She is a splash of artificial colors against the earth tones of the forest.

"No, really, I — " And she has disappeared. "Hello?" I say.

"Hello?"

"Come here," I shout.

"Come here." It is an echo off the ridge. Bodiless. Nonexistent.

"Come to me!"

"Come to me!" And I think for a moment I have heard your voice, Laura, your voice in the woods where I once took it for granted, where we once sang to each other from across glens and pine groves and gullies. But you don't come close.

I shake my head. Then let me be alone here with the trees. And with this small dainty fungus, and lichen, and the mushrooms pushing their way up.

I walk, I walk and I come through the other edge of the woods into the back of the property, to the other meadow I have not leased out. I startle a deer; it snorts and passes silently into the shadows of woods in the distance. It has been standing alone at the woods' edge, watching the young couple there in the grasses, making love in the flowers. At first I am angry because I have meant for them not to be here; I want to shout that they are trespassing. But I see that

they are making real love in the flowers. And they have a kind of silent rhythm in their body-conversation. And I remember — I remember why I did not lease out this part of the property.

"Hey, Pops." A whisper and a hand on my arm. "Come on now, let's go where there are people."

I look at the girl and right into her eyes, her blue and beautiful even if drugged eyes. "Why did you follow me?"

"Follow you? No. I was just walking in the woods." Her voice is so much like — like yours, Laura's. At first I almost think that — no, she could be like a young you, but only like a young you. "Actually," she whispers, "I've been following you for some time, Redgunk."

"I've got to rest before I walk back. I can't walk very far at one time — " I start to sit on a large stone but she grabs me by my armpit and keeps me from it, shaking her young head.

"I really think just a little rest — "

"No, not yet, Pops. Come be young!" She practically drags me back up the hill through the trees. She is so much like you. I remember so well how you were like a steamroller and if you wanted something, by God you would have it, you would work hard for it, steaming along, and get it, and if you wanted me to do something — how intertwined two people become! How much I miss you!

"Here Pops!" And we've stopped at the tree line where the mobile home has been all these years to look across the vast sea of people. "Ever hear of Woodstock, Pops?"

I look at her in disbelief. Silly girl. Have you? I want to demand of her.

"Or Woodstock Two? It's bigger than that." I nod my head and notice that we've spilled over into the Childers farm, too, and that Mr. Warren's neat little stakes have been pulled up or used for tents and makeshift lean-to's. No doubt he will blame that on me. Good.


"Come on Pops," and she yanks my hand and we are suddenly among the people, these young kids and a few older ones, no doubt original Beergoozer fans. I am not the only one here.

Punch-punch-punch! I am hit by the bass in my gut, in my chest. It feels good. I literally feel the blood pumping in my body, circu-

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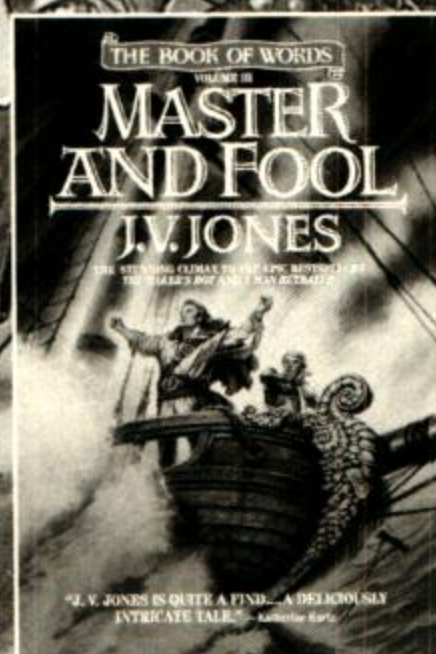
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lating, living inside me. It cycles round and round with each bass punch-punch-punch! And the girl has yelled "Yahooo" at the wild tops of her unbridled lungs and I feel the electric excitement of a guitar lick or some drumbeat or maybe just the massive crowd standing and whooping and calling for more songs! And I almost, almost, cry out "Yooooop!" myself though I can't quite muster it, and so close my eyes and listen to the crazy, dynamic, living, rushing sound of a million lives, of more than a million lives singing out and cycling up into the air. I am suddenly so alive!

"Come on, Pops!" My heart is racing and I don't remember how to move and I want to just feel the energy-wind. But she takes my hand, almost as if there is an urgency about it all, and we pass into a tent city: a makeshift tie-dye shop, someone selling vegetarian karma-free tofu burgers, someone else with beads, a first-aid booth, and then into another tent made of orange parachute and full of a thick ropy smoke of incense, and inside of which on a Persian worn-carpet is a woman, a dark woman, an older woman dressed like a gypsy or an old hippie, hard to tell which.

"This is a friend of mine, Pops. I wanted you to meet her." I look at the girl with a question mark in my eyes. "She reads palms, Pops, and it's really incredible what she can do."

"I don't believe in —"

"Pops!" she says at me; she is a girl who gets her way. "Sometimes we need help to do what we want most to do."

"Sit down," says the dark woman. "I am Fatima. And your friend has been trying to get you here for a long time."

"A long time —" I chuckle at her. Does she mean that a few hours this first morning of the festival is a long time?

"Sit down, Pops. Really. This is cool."

I cannot sit down. My legs don't do that. Fatima motions for my young companion to pass over a folding chair, and I manage with some difficulty to ease into it.

Outside and all around, the music is playing. Now it is some acoustic group with what sounds like a thousand conga drums, though with the same punch-punch-punch bass, and they, too, are playing Beergoozer tunes, the more romantic ones with the more complex rhythms that made many short-sighted critics claim the Beergoozers were merely a flash in the pan without any poetic sense; we, the people, knew better:

*Tryin' to be your boyfriend for 16 days
I wanna be your baby, tried so many ways
to score ya
you say I bore ya
But I wanna be your babe,
your scabies babe:*

I wanna be your scabies baby

*and I'm ready to begin
with you as my wife
for the rest of our life
pickin' scabies from our skin*

*As long as you're with me, I will always be true
I'll be a rock-and-rollin' scabies baby for you.*

It is the one that was on the radio that whole trip to California, our honeymoon, driving over the Golden Gate and up through the silent hearts of redwoods, and I sang it to you as we lay together in the San Francisco Hotel with the window open and the curtains moving back and forth in the gentle breeze; I sang it as I touched you after the love-making, and then held your hand.

"Hello? Are you still with me?" the fortune teller is saying and has been saying for some time, and now she strokes the hand she's holding, and I focus. "Are you all right?"

I look at her with disbelief. How could I not be all right, with that song playing and the drums drumming and the sounds of San Francisco streets still in my ears? How could I possibly not be all right?

"You have a very interesting palm."

"Interesting?" My voice cracks. I've always used the word when — nothing laudable was applicable.

"I mean interesting," she says. "It says: You must seize the day."

"Seize the day." Of course, of course. What other platitudinous thing would be more appropriate to say on a day like today, in the middle of a Beergoozer festival? I'm sure my expression reveals what I think of this woman.

"I mean it," she says. She is frustrated. "You've not been doing it, the way a living being should! Get a life."

I close my eyes. It is hard to seize the day when you are in pain and mostly sick, and the person you have been so intricately tied together with ends herself just by no longer being herself in a wheelchair in a strange nursing home, where she forgets your name and your face, though her face and yours have rested so close together on a lifetime of pillows. For a lifetime. And she leaves you alone, really alone, and is gone. Gone.

"I mean it," says the fortune teller. "Wake up, will you? Your life line tells me that you must live, now, quickly!"

She means I don't have long to live. "Duh," I tell her. Some sick 90 year-old guy sits down in my tent, I could tell him the same thing.

"You are a water witch, aren't you?"

I nod and am suddenly startled by this: How could she know it? I have this — this organ in me that trembles when the willow branches stir and there is water beneath the ground.

"Those senses," she says, "use those senses now! Now!"

"I —"

"You have been living with her, you know, living for her, talking to her — in this thick soup of nostalgia-fantasy; but it is nostalgia-fantasy that keeps you from her, that will not let you live in the here and now; you've got to stop being so damned nostalgic —"

"You're a fortune-telling ex-hippie at a Beergoozer reunion concert complaining about *my* nostalgia?"

**They watch you
as you move in their
circle, watch from
their own swaying concentric circles, in that giant
mandala that stretches out as far as the eye can see.
You are the center of a ripple that has given form
to the masses, molded them into the
ordered chaos of circular dance.**

"Let it go — "

"I won't let her go. She is all I have — "

"Did I say let her go? Live, would you?"

"I — "

"I hate it when I have to do this — " She reaches for something.

"Here, I have something to show you."

"But — "

Suddenly there is a snake in her hand, a strange snake with glowing eyes and she hurls it at me, and my heart stops and I stand up and it stabs its fangs at me and I fall to the carpet and at once the carpet itself is not made of thread but of snakes, tiny, wild snakes. I scream out. Yes. I am very, very conscious of the present moment.

"Go," she says, "She's been bugging the hell out of me to get you to come see her — good Lord, the woman is a steamroller. For real! Go!" I hesitate and she says, "Look, you think I *chose* to be some super-sensitive psychic open to the spirit world? You think I paid to be this way or something? You think it's fun being a medium for any pushy spirit to bully around? You think I like gettin' steam-rollered any more than you do? Listen and listen good, Bub! I ain't coming back to Redgunk, Mississippi, so make it good." But I did like it, the steamrolling: Your way, that is. "Go!" And I stumble from her tent, from the wild dance of snakes and the suffocation of her incense. Laura! Are you there?

And there is the kid, the young girl with the psychedelic scarf. She says: "Let's dance, Pops!" It is close to dark already. Has she somehow slipped me some of her hallucinogens?

"Who are you?" I demand of her, having seen just the glimmer of something familiar in her eyes. But now — suddenly now — I see her fully. I see you fully. All along she has been you.

Surfin', Surfin' Mamacita — Ah

Down a Marguerita

Do it with your feet — Aaah!

Laura? I say to you, and you laugh and twirl and the flowers fall around you; you have the wildflowers in your hair, Harriet's wildflowers; you are not wearing a tie-dyed scarf after all — must have been my eyes, blurring the colors.

Surfin', Surfin' Mamacita ...

Someone is playing *Surfin' Mamacita*, with a tape of weird horns played backward in a loop, just like on the original LP version. And I see you, my Mamacita. My Scabies Baby! I can't believe it is — you! Magic. The music really is magic, Laura. Do you see what it is doing to me? It really does — take me back. No, forward. It really does — Laura?

Someone's on stage, strumming his guitar. It is one of the Beergoozers. One of the damned originals. He looks like a little Taoist sage, bow-legged, fat, bald, with a nose that's gone all pimply and red with too many late parties at too late an age. But he's doing *Surfin', Surfin' Mamacita* — that glorious and divine sound; yes, it's his voice we've heard all these years! His voice created a sound and created an age and his voice and the three that join him now in the harmonies we channeled through our own bodies through the magic rite of mimicry, in our straining voices with air guitars in front of the mirrors of extended adolescence. And now I hit the downbeat with an invisible magic pick and sing out: *Surfin', Surfin' Mamacita!* And a thousand kids or more are singing the same damned thing! And there is guitar magic in the air, the stringed magic of Orpheus, recreating life from the stage.

Laura? You are laughing again and twirling with the Orphic music and the flowers are showering the ground all around you. And now — you are surrounded by multitudes of beings. They watch you as you move in their circle, watch from their own swaying concentric circles, in that giant mandala that stretches out as far as the eye can see. You are the center of a ripple that has given form to the masses, molded them into the ordered chaos of circular dance. You are sur-

rounded by living, moving things. Not people, but strange beings: Some of them are snakes, golden-winged snakes, and others strange squat creatures, sentient creatures drinking weird poisons and speaking indecipherable incantations to the punch-punch-punching beat that drives your feet and my heart, faster and faster. Some of them are moving rainbow beings, winged, flashing around in their own tiny circles, feeling their own natural space.

And my body lurches, as if the heart has stopped, again, completely — no, as if some devil has ripped from me and away, and the scales before my eyes have fallen aside, and I do not have to peer through physical cataracts to try to see you, or to see glimpses of you from the corners of my eye there in the woods or there among the fresh columbines or bending to pick the stalks of poke salat. I see you, Laura. I see that you are close. And I realize I am breaking through to you or you to me. That we have broken through. To the place where you really are, Laura. The place we really are — and have been all these years. Which means all the other possible places are illusion.

I used to call you Mamacita. I used to call you my Scabies Baby. When we were in California, you called me Redgunk — in the manner people do, calling so and so Tex or Houston — and you called yourself, jokingly, Redgunk's Woman. And everyone thought that: *Hey, these guys must have some cultural connection with the Beergoozers.* Hello, Redgunk's Woman. Now I call you that again. Now I call you Laura. Now I have no name for you, the silence is your name, the music is your magic mantra-name stretched visibly from the crowded fields of the Beergoozer Reunion Concert into the swirling majestic sky. And the pink and golden clouds floating overhead are like colossal statues at the gate of that new world beyond names.

In the old world, the Beergoozers are playing, the real guys. That means they've either come to the stage early or my sense of time is shot to hell. Orpheus: Orpheus Ledbetter. One of the names these kids do not even know, no doubt; the guitar licks and melodic voice of Orpheus Ledbetter have made time telescope, have made the sunset come to life, come to life as a living, breathing entity that wraps the world in moving color.

What the hell has that gypsy fortune teller slipped through my skin? No: What the hell have the Beergoozers done to me? What have they done to me all these years? What have you, Laura, Redgunk's Woman, done to me?

What difference does it make if the Beergoozers are playing early or if this is already the evening of the third day? The third day? If it is, have I been wandering around in a daze all this time? I have no sense of time or body or what I look like. If I have suddenly been transported through three days, perhaps I've been wandering around with blood coming down from my nose, my shirt ripped or buttoned crookedly. Perhaps I stood on the stage like that, as I seem to recall, and spoke into the microphone and made the crowds move their arms like wheat and cheer and announced that my own proceeds, the lease money, would go to tickets for those kids in cars still lining the freeway. I only know I do not feel pain in this place now where we are meeting, in this sunset-place. My legs feel free and the Beergoozers are singing.

Sunset: It is not a sunset of the natural world. It is a sunset between worlds, your world and mine, Laura. And the snakes — what I thought were snakes — are wild grasses, wildly colored and effervescent and shimmering. And the sun has gone down and the stars have come out and the frenzied wild dancing has slowed. And we slow-dance, you and I, my Laura, my Laura-love. We slow-dance, you and I.

Til dawn.

There is a breeze coming through the grasses; the clover and cornflowers and bluebells tremble. We sip our coffee.

The morning mists turn over into a light rain, which you have always loved. The festival is gone, of course, without trace. The grasses are fresh and tall; as they are in the back meadow as well; and the deer watch us from woods' edge. We are dancing, you and I, standing here with our coffee, dancing to the meadow's own song across the wildflowers. And for some reason the Childers place is no longer staked out: Mr. Warren has not replaced the stakes we've pulled up together. ♣

AND HORSES ARE BORN WITH EAGLES WINGS

Continued from page 48

whispers, then to silence.

Mr. Reed licked his lips, and I saw one hand tremble as he assembled and stacked some papers on the podium.

"Good evening," he said. "The staff and I appreciate the concerns of all you parents and guardians. This meeting tonight is intended as a forum for questions and answers, in hopes that hearing one another's views will enable us to find a compromise we can all accept. But before we begin, our music teacher wishes to address you." Again the rise in voices, and hands stabbed into the air. "Please. Please," Mr. Reed said. "You'll all have your chance to be heard afterward. I promise."

A low, swift susurrus of whispers rose, and died quickly as Madame Wanda stepped out onto the stage. She wore the same kind of outfit I'd seen the day before, a loose amalgam of bright prints, except where before they had had an African motif, these looked Eastern European. Her hair was still in a chignon, and strands escaped to frame her face.

Her hands were pressed together before her, palm to palm, as she looked over the audience. The room was utterly silent when at last she spoke.

"I am sorry," she said slowly, her accent more evident than it had been the day before. "I am very sorry to have been a cause of strife. For me, the best solution is to remove the cause, and so I will go away. Tonight."

Rustlings hissed through the room. Tension made my armpits burn with acid-sweat.

Spring yelled out, "You can't! That's giving in to the hate-freaks!" and then sound smote the walls, everyone speaking at once.

Madame Wanda raised one hand, palm out. Her fingers were long, and still, and graceful in their muscular structure. Beautiful hands, I thought, distracted. Aged, and beautiful.

The voices died to low whispers. "When I came, your children's ears were open. Their hearts were open to the joy that music can bring. Now their ears are closed. Their hearts are filled with anger, with fear, with contention. My music cannot bring them joy, therefore I must go."

She turned and walked off. Mr. Reed backed onto the stage, amid a roar of voices. He shook his head, talking earnestly, but I could not hear, close as I was to the stage. He turned, straightened, and walked to the podium. "Please, folks," he said, turning up the mike. "We'll now listen to one another ..." There was a terrible squawk of feedback from the antiquated sound system.

"I won't be the little lame boy," my mind chanted over and over. I took a deep breath and began to edge toward the door.

"I'll call on Mrs. Evans first," he said. "But you'll all get your chance ..."

I realized that I did not want to listen to Alison Evans' faint, poisonous voice. I slid along a little faster, found the exit door behind me, pressed the bar and slipped out.

Cool air was sweet on my face. The sound of voices from inside was muted, and I was glad I couldn't hear the words. I stood there, breathing slowly, fighting against a swarm of emotions I could not define as I looked for Madame Wanda.

My eyes adjusted to the darkness and I saw movement: a gray head bobbing as something was loaded into a car. I stepped forward, squinting, and the figure resolved into Madame Wanda.

She tucked her basket into the back seat of a battered old Toyota, and shut the door. If I did not speak, in a moment she would drive away.

I could watch her leave ... or I could be Dorothea, who dared to go and speak, to try to find, if not some answers, at least some understanding.

Madame Wanda heard my steps, and paused, waiting. The streetlight was directly behind her, so her face was in shadow.

"I wish you wouldn't go," I said. "My daughter — not just her, but

— "I spoke in a rush. "I loved the way I felt yesterday, when you played. I hate to see that taken away."

"It is not gone," Madame Wanda said. "If you remember it with the same joy with which you listened." She fumbled in a worn purse, and I heard the clink of keys. "My hope is that the children will remember the joy, and will seek it again, in music and in art, in literature, in one another."

"Oh please," I said. "I need to know ... how you did it?" When she said nothing, I made a nervous gesture. "You said yesterday to Alison Evans that the music was like a prayer. The daycare woman called you a magician."

"Ah." She gave that little nod, like a bow. "I think I understand your question. My music is a gift, and I give it to all who listen. They give back to me their joyful dreams, and in turn I send these out to those who have no music, but who wish to hear, to see, to feel that joy."

She didn't sound wise, or powerful: She sounded crazy.

But I saw what I saw. Would my doubts, my fears, diminish even the memory?

She leaned forward and touched my hand. "You are a seeker, and I am a giver. Know that givers still seek, and seekers can give. All it takes is faith."

She backed away. The light, now falling softly on her face, bathed her smile.

Madame Wanda raised one hand, palm out. Her fingers were long, and still, and graceful in their muscular structure.

"Faith in what? Is there really magic?" I blurted. *Is there something to believe in?* "If there is, and you believe you have it, why don't you go in there and tell them about it? Make them listen to your music? Make them be happy for their own good?"

Even as I said it, I felt the old paralyzing doubts grip me, the crippling sense of unworthiness that kept me in corners at parties, that made me sit at the side watching the others play games. That pressed me to the window when my mother said good-bye, and walked out the front door forever. "Except you can't," I said sickly. "Then you'd be just like Mrs. Evans."

"Her full nature," Madame Wanda said, "like that river of which Cyrus broke the strength, spent itself in channels which had no great name on the earth." I realized she was quoting. And the words were familiar, but my mind did not dwell on them, instead it raced ahead, looking for meaning — for direction — for truth.

"Free choice, is that it?" I said quickly. "Force makes many a sinner, but not one saint." *But how can we let our children choose freely? The cost, when we are wrong, is so terrible.*

Behind us, the double doors banged open, and voices spilled out: excited, angry, resigned, even humorous.

Madame Wanda tipped back her head, and continued softly. "The effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs."

She touched my cheek in a brief caress, then turned and opened her car, and slid into it, and started the engine. Still standing on the sidewalk, I watched; just as the first of the parents reached me, she drove away slowly.

The people flowed around me, all of them talking, but I stood where I was, an island in the tide of humanity, embracing the answer that was no answer, but the gift — the flash! — of a much greater question.

For I had recognized the quotation.

It was the last paragraph of *Middle-march*. ♣

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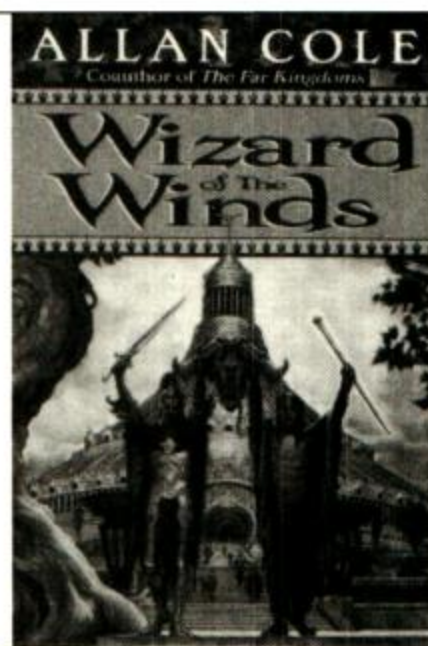
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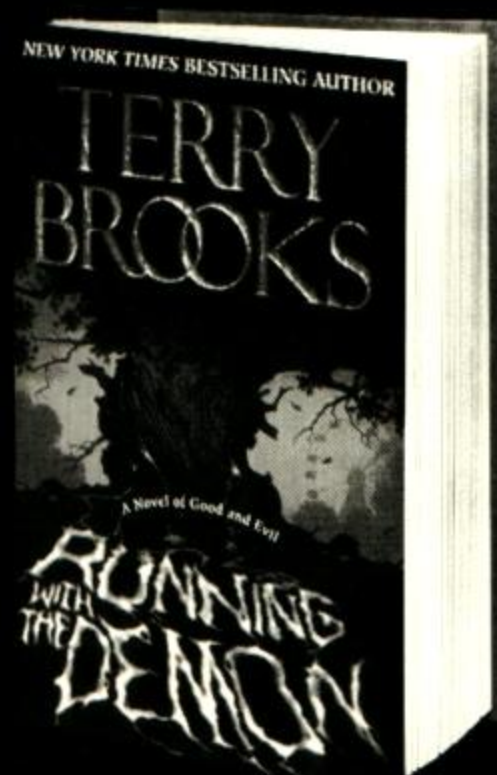
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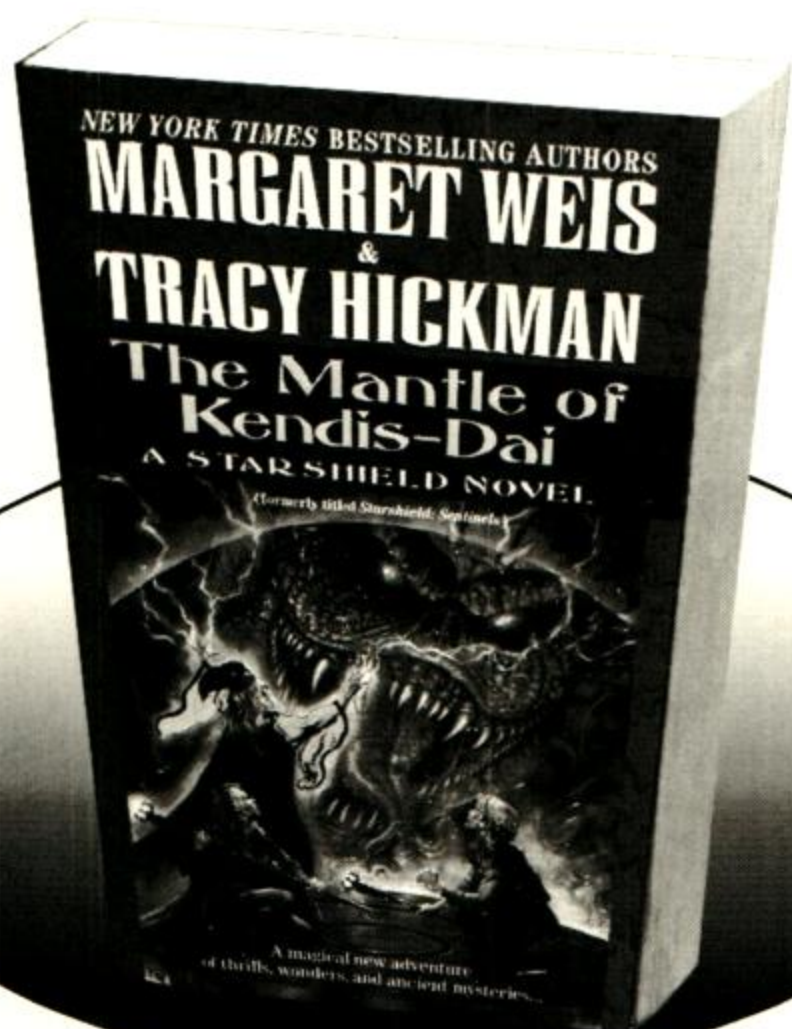
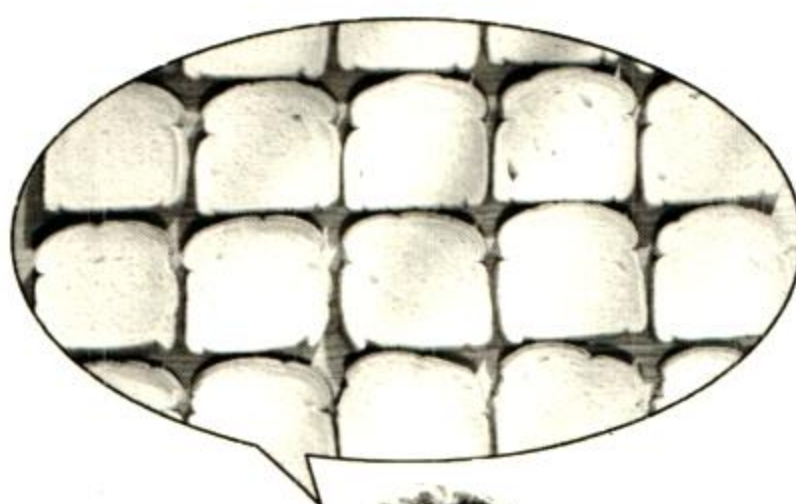
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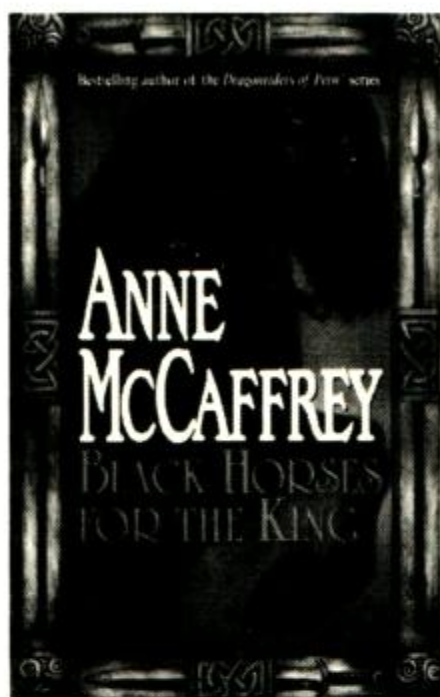
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Greetings,

I am responding to the question put forth in the April 1997 issue in reply to a letter sent by a Mr. Elliot. Namely, what elements do a fantasy make? Although he lost me with his litany of baseball movies, I agree with the man that all fiction is not fantasy. To me, fantasy is anything that has the power to take us away from the here and now. The more based in today's world, the less I enjoy the story. "The Church at Monte Saturno," by Robert Silverberg, for example, is not a true fantasy, at least in my mind, as it held too many elements of this world, e.g., set in Sicily, and references to religion.

I suppose I empathize with Miss Boynton's letter as well (April '97) in that fantasy is best in the traditional form of wizards, warriors, and dragons because they are not of this world. The concept of these creatures fills one with a sense of wonder, not reality.

I might also suggest that real-world religion has no place in a fantasy story. All in all, I find ROF to be a wonderful fantasy magazine. My one complaint would be that when I see a painting of a traditional fantasy on the cover, I would like to discover at least one traditional story within.

Sincerely,
Ryan Kent
Alden, NY

Thanks for putting some thought into answering our question, Ryan. However, I find myself a bit confused by your reasoning. One of the greatest traditional fantasies I can think of would be King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. Searching for the cup that Jesus Christ drank from, the Holy Grail is, well, rather a religious element inherent in that tale — wouldn't you agree? And if the real churches that you attend have paintings akin to the ones in Robert Silverberg's story, no wonder you are a bit leery of religious reference!

Shawna,

In your June editorial, you note that "when an author is locked into the same characters and setting ... there is no real room for growth." That is unfortunately true for many, but not all series type novels. The best manage to satisfy the commercial requirements of continuity while at the same time painting a real-life portrait. Travis McGee ages believably in John D. McDonald's wonderful McGee books, and who could fail to recognize the significant changes that occur to the protagonists of Tony Hillerman's delightful mysteries? I do realize that these examples come from outside the field of fantasy. Far too often I think that readers demand and authors attempt little change in the status and lives of the characters spanning their novels. Readers should indeed peruse the shelves of

their local bookstores for something new. It is entirely possible to stay loyal to old favorites while discovering fresh perspectives.

Ed Carmien
North Brunswick, NJ

Dear Mrs. McCarthy,

Next year I will be studying abroad in Cork, Ireland so I especially enjoyed your editorial on Ireland. I have just finished my first year of ROF and I am not disappointed. Every issue provides great stories, interesting columns, informative reviews and my favorite recurring feature is "Folkroots," hands down.

I would also like to take this opportunity to respond to Scott Hornoff's letter in the April issue of ROF. Stories often change to match the times and to reflect contemporary truths. When Malory wrote his "Morte D'arthur" there may have been people ticked off because he messed with the Welsh legends. Personally, I enjoyed the re-telling of Stephen Dedman's "The Pretender," and I was impressed with its originality.

Michael Manzer
Rock Springs, WY

Thanks for all the kind words. Incidentally, the editorial on Ireland was written by my "trusty" assistant, Rebecca McCabe. She says to be sure and to explore the Aran Islands while you are abroad. As for Stephen Dedman's "The Pretender," glad you enjoyed it.

Dear Ms. McCarthy,

Is a new slant on an old tale always welcome? NO IT IS NOT! This may startle you, but on reflection you will appreciate that certain characters are potent symbols of certain qualities. If the new slant emphasizes the quality this character symbolizes, then the new slant is exciting. If the new slant satirizes the quality, the new slant is hilarious. However, if the new slant ignores, or drastically changes the character it represents, then the new slant is irritating in the extreme. To do away with the qualities the readers expect is to risk reader-ire. Referring to Mallory's work as "the mold," Galahad is the model of the medieval perfection of youth. He is valorous and virginal out of choice. Clearly Mr. Hornoff has read his Mallory, and finds the break with the concept of who Galahad is objectionable. To not engage in sex because one does not care for the opposite sex is different than because one believes fornication is a sin. It is no surprise that Mr. Hornoff was irritated.

This whole thing brings me to another issue you have raised. The purpose of fantasy. Fantasy and myth are symbolic representations of our psyches. Our feelings about our relations with authority figures, maturation, problem-solving strategy, etc., all come

to term through myth and fantasy. When characters such as Lancelot or Galahad are created, people turn to them for models of behavior. Wouldn't it be nice if more teenage boys behaved like Galahad?

Cynthia Joyce Clay
Kendall, FL

Whew! You expect quite a lot from your fantasies, Cynthia! We appreciate your thoughtful reply. Your letter is the type of interesting feedback we were looking for.

Dear Ms. Shawna McCarthy,

Hi. I hope this letter finds you well. I am truly sorry for my last letter re: "The Pretender." I certainly must have come across as "uppity" or "high-on-the-horse." Apologies.

Peace,
Scott Hornoff
Cranston, RI

Dear Realms,

Could we please leave the sex scenes out of ROF? After the first page of Dedman's "The Pretender" I could not continue. Stories can only be good if sex of ANY kind is kept out.

Cathy Davidson
Centerburg, OH

Now when I read the first page of "The Pretender" I was immediately intrigued by the details" ... it had been the custom of the court in less peaceful times that no knight without a face wound was permitted to sit at the King's table" and, "... even in armor he moved with the grace of some mythical beast, part cat, part dragon." These words compelled me to read on. Once the story was published, I was impressed with the combination of Dedman's story and Alan Lee's wonderful painting of Camelot on the first page. I guess we all see what we want to see.

To Terri Windling,

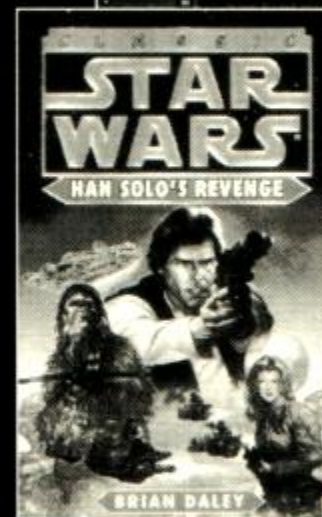
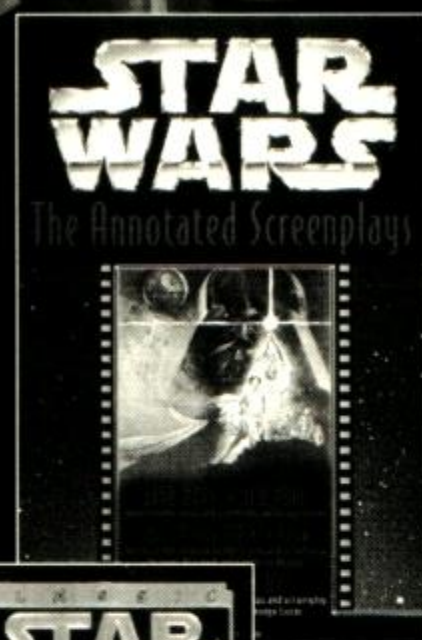
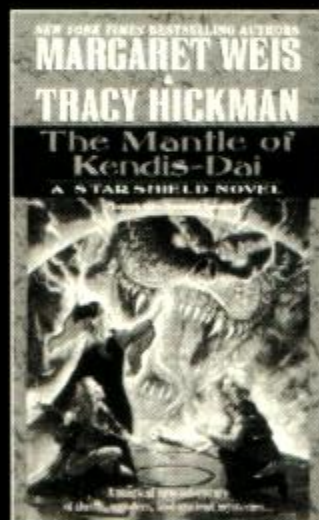
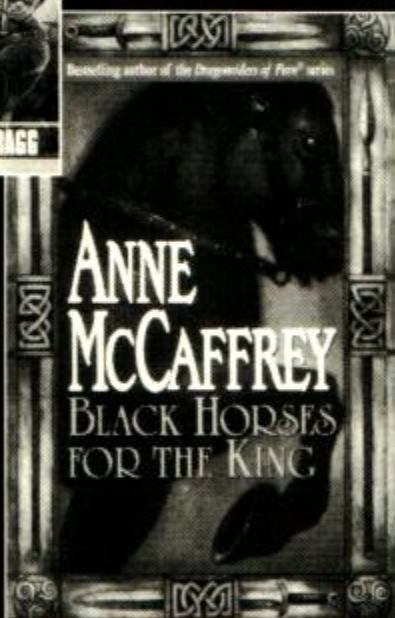
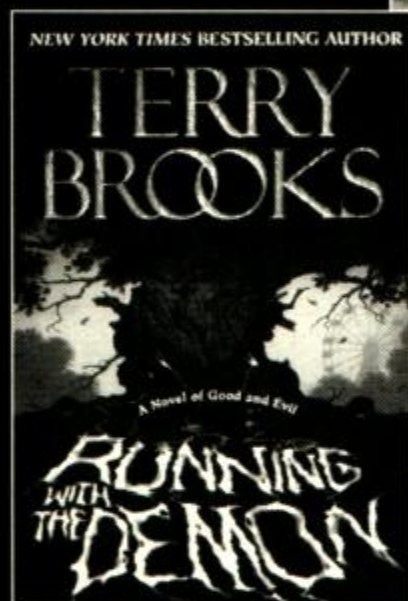
I've been wanting to let you know how much I appreciate your column. I appreciate not just the essay content but the frequent mentioning of books for further reading (though I must admit you are hurting my checkbook!). In fact, your discussion of various aspects of folklore helped guide me out of the pursuit of a Ph.D. in English and into the pursuit of a Ph.D. in folklore. I'm happy to say I've been admitted into the doctoral program of Folklore and Folklife at the University of Pennsylvania. Thanks for unknowingly guiding me!

R. Wayne Davis
Westminster, CO

Your letters and comments are welcome. Send them to: Letters to the Editor, Realms of Fantasy, P.O. Box 527, Rumson, NJ 07760. E-mail to: s.mccarthy@genie.geis.com

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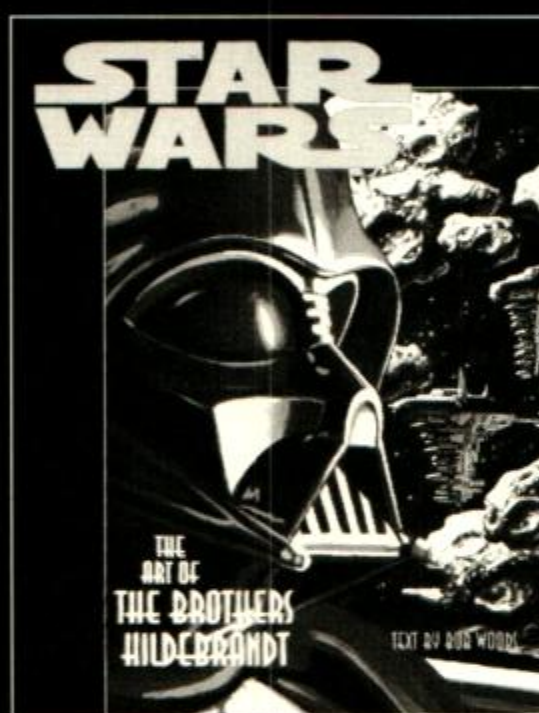
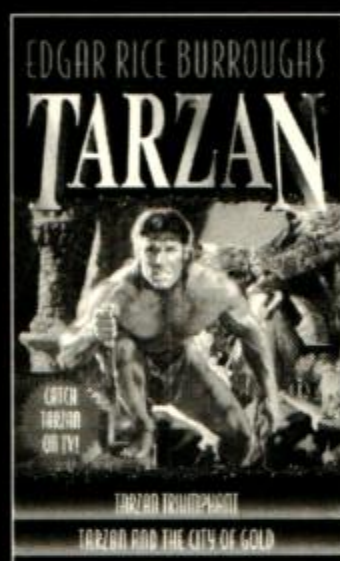
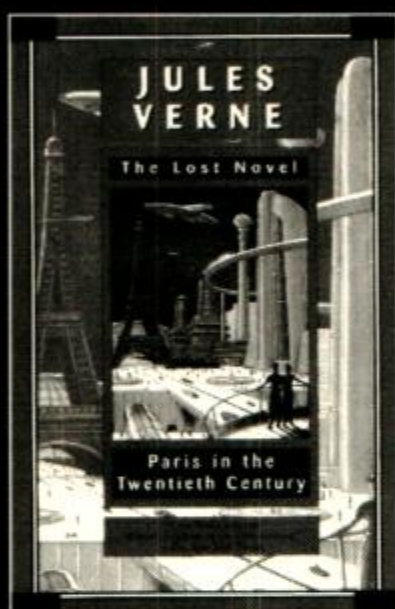
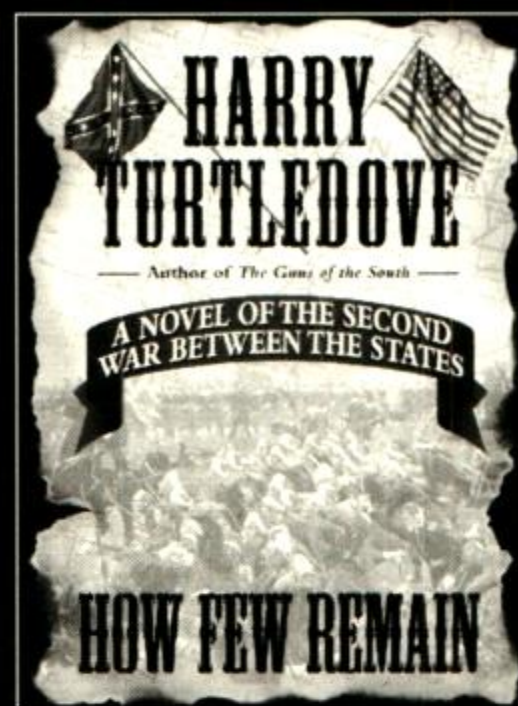
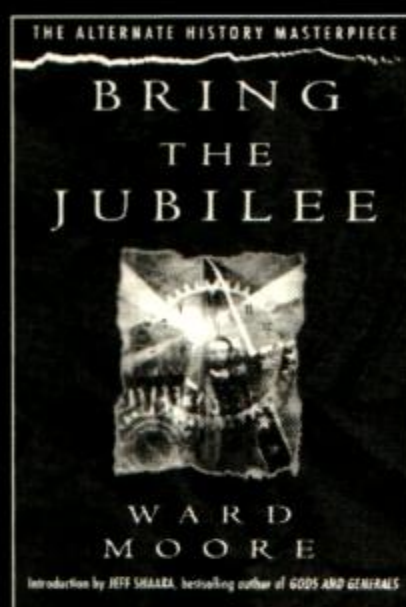
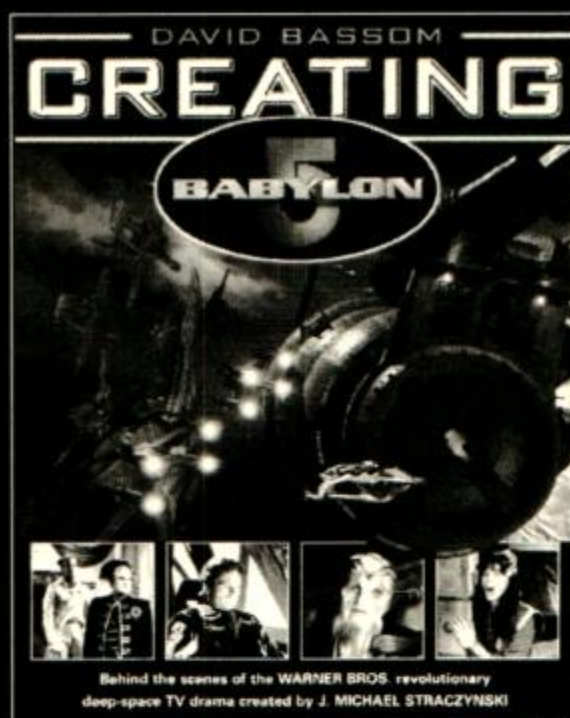


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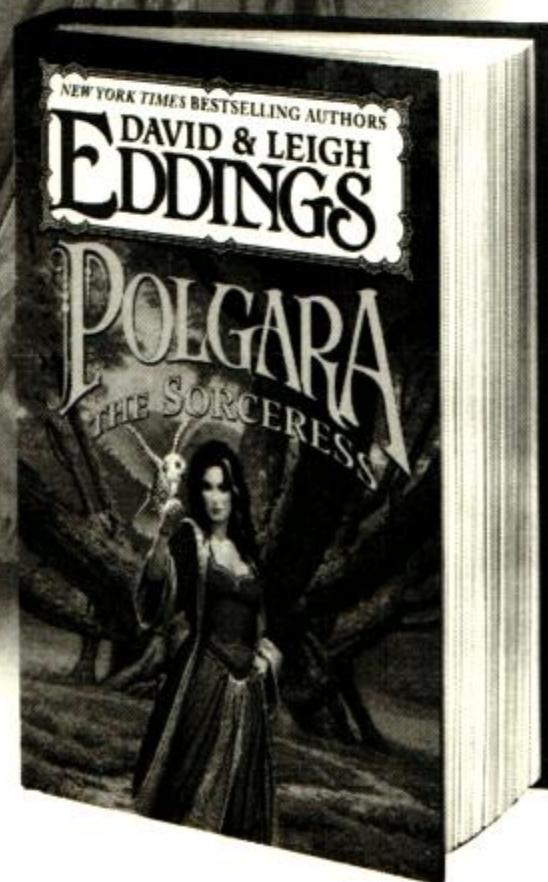
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LENINGRAD BLUES

Continued from page 61

addition to their band — they were just glad to be playing again.

When *Sinnii Kaif* opened the underground Leningrad Blues Club, they took the place by storm. Everybody who was anybody was there that Friday night. The energy level was off the scale as we all caught an amazing case of the Leningrad blues. That first concert revived Peter's flagging interest in his music. That very Saturday, Peter started working on a new album with Sasha and Zhenia. After their third night in a row at the Leningrad Blues Club, the Boss was tempting Peter with an official *Melodiia* record contract if only he would change the band's rather suspect name.

The week that followed was filled with music. *Sinnii Kaif* would be the main attraction at the Leningrad Blues Club the next weekend. Peter wanted to put together an entirely new set so the practice sessions out at *Chukotka* lasted most of the day and into the night. Liuba didn't seem to mind at all. She was such a kind, gentle spirit. She learned and sang her songs while the boys jammed on and on. But looking back on it now, I should have realized that something was wrong.

The next Friday night, *Strana Chudes* (one of our city's up-and-coming bands) opened the Leningrad Blues Club. By the time *Sinnii Kaif* went on stage, the audience had been so warmed up that you could almost cut the sweat-drenched air with a knife. Liuba wasn't feeling well so she refused to go on stage. I stood backstage with her as we watched Peter, Sasha, and Zhenia play. They were so hot that I thought they were going to burn the place down.

And then, while they were playing the new version of *Orpheus and Eurydice*, it happened.

"Oh, Peter," I heard Liuba whisper. "Now I know it's true. You love your music more than you love me." And she started to cry. And she kept on crying and crying. Crying or melting, I was never quite sure. I just stood by not knowing what to do.

From his perch up on the tiny stage, Peter realized that something was wrong. He closed his eyes and tried to pour all of himself into his guitar and harmonica. Using the power of his music, he tried to make her stop crying, tried to hold her together, tried to keep her from melting away. But it was already too late. You could hear an edge of desperation in his playing.

When Peter opened his eyes, Liuba was gone. There was nothing left of her but a puddle of water filled with the very same clothes (now soaking wet) that I had gone to so much trouble to acquire. Peter was devastated. The concert came to a grinding halt. All hell broke loose as the audience rioted. The chaos only got worse when the militia

stormed the club a few minutes later.

For months afterward, Peter refused to touch his guitar or harmonica. But by the time the next Black Days of Winter came around, Sasha and Zhenia coaxed him out of his depression and back into a jam session. It was as if his magic touch had never left him. In fact, his talent had only grown stronger than ever before.

After he lost Liuba, Peter's music just got better and better. At long last, he had a real case of the honest-to-God blues. He no longer had to play the part and pretend. If *Sinnii Kaif's* first three *samizdat* tapes were merely excellent, the five that followed Liuba's disappearance were filled with the bluest blues you could ever imagine. His music became his mourning. His lost love of Liuba filled every one of his songs. Each time I play those tapes, I get so sad that I can't help but cry. The Soviet Union, you see, outlived Peter by several months.

One night during the spring thaw of 1991, Peter went out ice fishing as he often did. The ice must have cracked and given way beneath him. The next day all that Sasha could find out on the ice was Peter's ice-fishing gear, four frozen fish, and his long black coat. Peter and his harmonica had disappeared without a trace.

Although Peter's body was never found, his legend has done nothing but grow. From time to time, some of my fellow veterans from the underground scene, while out walking on the Neva during the Black Days of Winter claim to have heard the haunting sound of a blues harmonica carried across the ice. Some even claim to have seen Peter wandering in the distance searching for his lost Liuba. So, in his own way, Peter is very much alive and well.

As for me ... there's no need for you to worry about me. These days I tend to get lumped together with all those New Russians that you may have heard about. My pedigree, however, is quite different (you may be surprised to learn that most of them began their careers in the *Komsomol*). But since I had my finger in the pie from the very beginning, the import-export business treats me very well. My fortune has been so good that I can spend the Black Days of Winter right here in America — although I always make sure that I'm back home in Peter for the White Nights. How well off am I? Well, let me just end this story with an anecdote:

One winter, a New Russian was out ice fishing for old time's sake. Minutes after putting his line into the water, he caught the Golden Fish. Before the Fish had a chance to open its mouth and barter a wish in exchange for its freedom, the New Russian smiled magnanimously and asked: "Well, Fish, what is it that *you've* always wanted?"

But given half a chance, I might still wish for a few more perfect moments of pure *kaif*. ♣

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NORTHERN KNIGHTS AND GOTHIC DAYS

The Art of Ian Miller

BY JANE FRANK

*"My images are the stuff of dreams and apparitions, the tremors
that touch the skirt of day. Unspoken thoughts, stored memories,
drawn up to be aired and then twisted by fancy."*



Miller's dark, "Gothic" sensibilities are well-suited to illustrating Tolkien's classic *Lord of the Rings*, 1993. **INSET BELOW:** *Swamp Thing IV: Quest for the Elementals* — one of six DC comic covers (1991) made unforgettable by Miller's unique style.

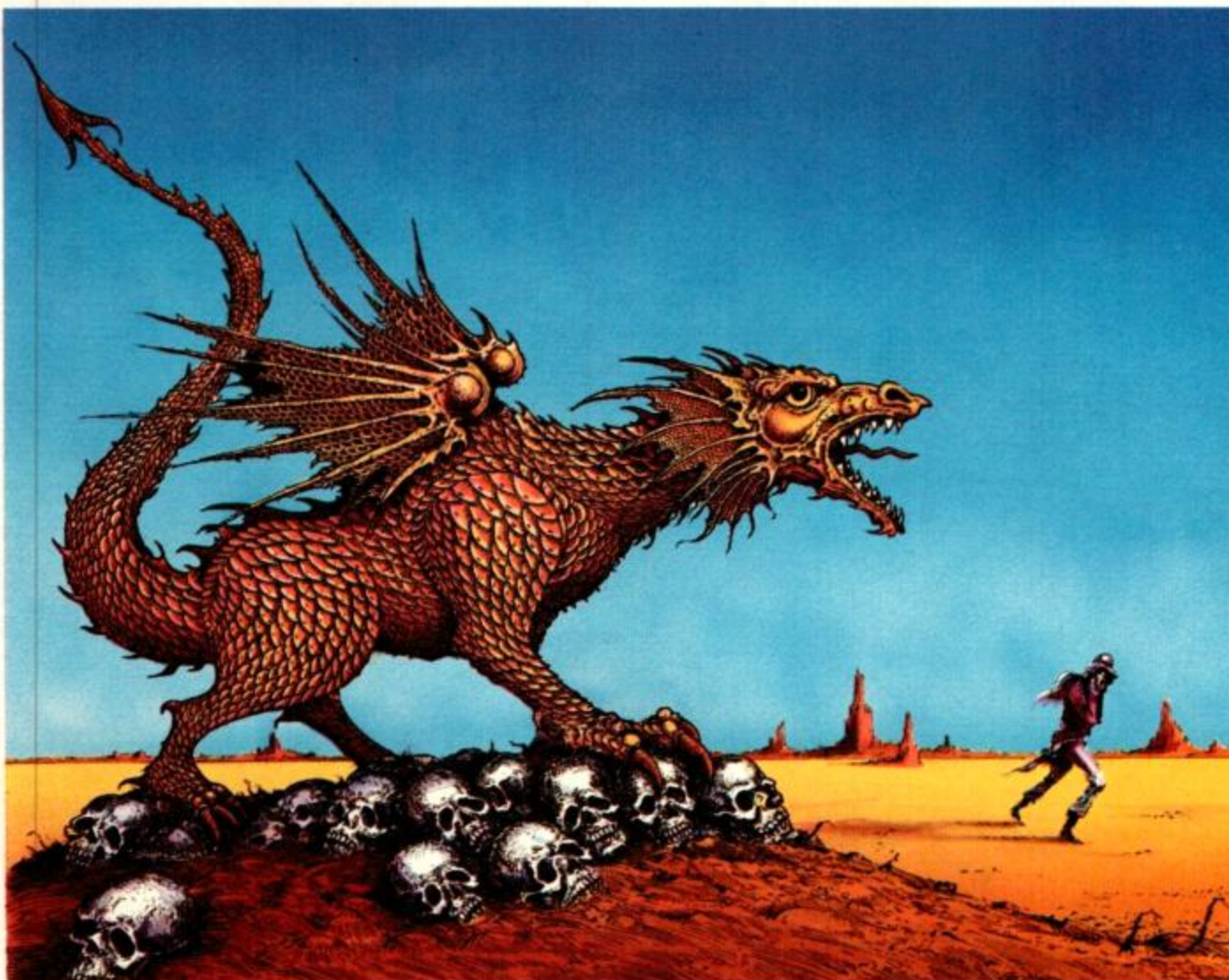
Lan Miller's recollections of childhood credit a set of 12 colored pencils on his sixth birthday, his mother's involvement with the theater and film industry, Saturdays spent at the local movie house, and six years' worth of once-weekly art instruction at a dreary English school under an art master affectionately known as "Old Dribble," for his fascination with gnarled trees, twisted towers, and crumbling Gothic cities.

Miller also swears that his near-sightedness (he wears lenses hand-ground in Switzerland by Zeiss) must have influenced his obsessional regard for surface details and what he calls his "tight pen style." But nothing, including his early fascination with toy



soldiers and stage props, battle strategies and war machines, stick puppets and comics, prepares viewers for this British artist's extraordinary "Gothic" sensibilities and brilliantly idiosyncratic style.

Miller believes his early interest in the story-telling process and the world of make-believe is the ordinary consequence of a child's imagination coupled with a folklorist's intent on sharing arcane knowledge of strange ceremonies and mythic quests. This perception is sensible only if one considers it appropriate for a young child to spend his waking hours "picture staring", and have "a cannibal" as an imaginary friend. The former, says Miller, entails taking



a photograph of your choice and staring at it fixedly, without blinking, until the figures begin to move in a slow, dream-like motion. The latter is attributed to the loneliness of the cannibal who, chancing upon the young lad and his Mother at a furniture store while they were out shopping on a Saturday afternoon, decided to pay visits to young Ian at home, usually very late at night, to the consternation of his parents.

Miller is an artist gifted with a unique and distinctive style of expression. "He's a California condor — a 'rare bird'" according to Barry Jackson, production designer for Bakshi's 1991 animated movie *Cool World*, "one of those individuals whose originality shines all the more brightly in this day and age where individualism is discouraged, espe-

cially in the marketplace." Jackson, an admirer who recruited Miller for the background design team on *Cool World*, says his first introduction to Miller's memorably eccentric concept designs was through the 1977 animated film *Wizards*, and "the art alone was worth the price of admission."

That would be old news to British and American readers who had already experienced — and been astounded by — Miller's strange, dark and densely rendered cover art and interior illustrations for such authors as Ray Bradbury, H.P. Lovecraft, Poul Anderson, H.G. Wells, and Philip K. Dick.

Publishers found his highly detailed, almost claustrophobic style to be as perfectly suited to the secret labyrinths and bizarre characters of authors like Tolkien and Peake

and Poe as it was to depicting the grim sadness of Bradbury's *Martian Chronicles*. So, by the time Miller's drawing of Mervyn Peake's "Gormanghast" came to the attention of the animated filmmaker Ralph Bakshi, of *Fritz the Cat* and *Heavy Traffic* fame, who promptly offered him a job on *Wizards*, Miller had been a successful commercial illustrator for several years.

It was during his studies at the prestigious St. Martin's School of Art in London that the artist greatly expanded his knowledge of art history and technique. There he also developed a lifelong admiration of the artist Albrecht Dürer, and established his unique painting style, which he agrees is influenced by the North European Expressionist Tradition. As Miller explains it, this style of paint-

For *Dog Bite* (1994), a private commission, the artist included his favorites: a walking tree, wasps, ornately costumed tin soldiers, and stick puppets, all portrayed in a surreal setting. TOP LEFT: One of the many memorable images created for *Wizards of the Coast's Magic: The Gathering/Visions cards*. BELOW LEFT: Exquisite ink and watercolor book cover art for *The Cygnet and the Firebird* by Patricia A. McKillip (1994).



ing places emphasis on temporal scenes and is concerned with mood and the observation of things "close in" versus the sweeping heavenly vistas, classical proportions, and large sweeps of color that we associate with painters of the Italian Renaissance. During his years at St. Martin's, Miller also transformed his sizable etching skills into an incredible proficiency with pen and ink. So much so that by the late '70s, Miller had not only participated in almost a dozen group and solo exhibitions of his art, he was also teaching art courses at various colleges, doing stints as an art director, and contributing to art books featuring the work of established fantasy artists (*Flights of Icarus*, 1977; *Contemporary Illustrations of Fantasy*, 1979; *The Tolkien Bestiary*, 1979). This time period was

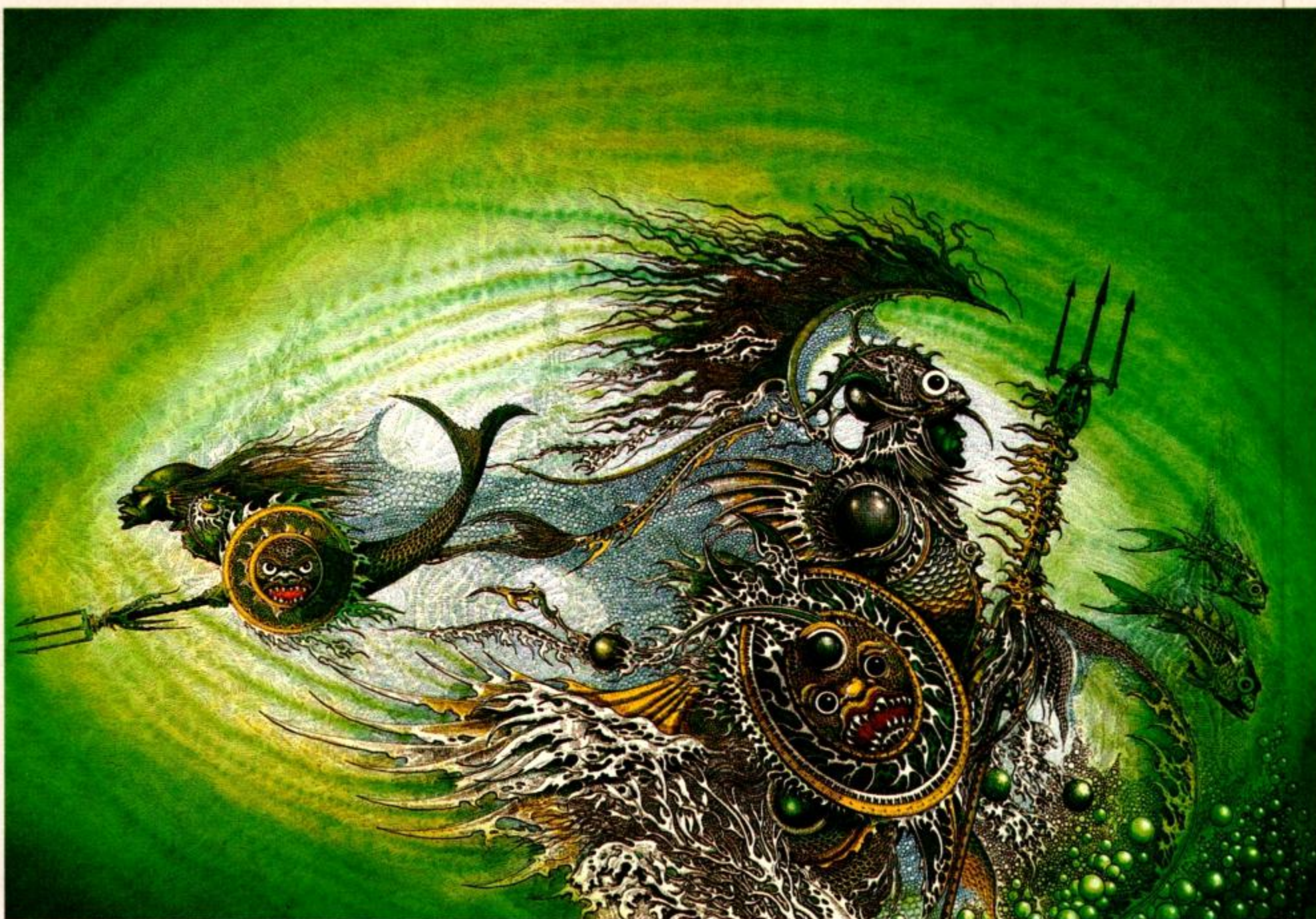
memorable also for the series of cover illustrations commissioned by Bantam Books for novels by Bradbury, and for the first fully illustrated paperback editions of Crichton's *Eaters of the Dead* (1976) and Bradbury's *Martian Chronicles* (1979), both of which were notable for the artist's outstanding pen and ink interiors. This activity culminated in the publication of his first "solo" art book, *Green Dog Trumpet and Other Stories*, "tales of thwarted heroism and misadventure in a nursery landscape which is also a Gothic Hell" (Dragon Dreams Ltd., 1978).

Miller has been paid, and handsomely, to create paintings that have been described as "microcosms of nervous unease" ... "the product of an anxious, 'Gothic' sensibility" ... "fantasies whose point is the bitterness of

failure; a sense of loss, of disillusionment, and ironic unfulfillment."

Study his images over time, and you'll see his favorite emblems depicted over and over again: Insects (in particular members of the fly family) rocking horses, dogs, crows, scarecrows, and rats. Once in a while furry critters (of no special family or order) and fish—fish that are heavily armored, cutting through barbed seas; fish with piranha-like mouths and bulging eyes; totem-fish with bodies bloated and speared clear through, raised high and twisting in the wind in a vaguely north-south direction like a giant wind sock, and which — occasionally — have one set of eyes too many.

Miller helps us to see beauty in decay, excretia, bile, vomit; those who cannot see



the majesty in these things must deal with Miller's commitment to shoving the vilest and most vitriolic of visual messages in our faces. Some examples of titles for artwork give clues to the themes: "The Vomit Hounds"; "Death in the Rocking Horse Factory"; "Angel Butcher"; "Udder Woman"; "Killer of Cows"; "Santa Chaos."

"Being of an essentially simple disposition ... I have always endeavored to present my images in the clearest and most direct terms as possible," says Miller, who began the '80s with the publication of another compendium of his works, *Secret Art* (Dragon Dreams Ltd., 1980) and ended the decade with *Ratspike* (Games Workshop, 1989). In the intervening years, Miller continued to act the Renaissance Man, with projects for mime companies, costume designs for a Warner Bros. TV series, job as Art Director for *Interzone* Magazine, a decade's worth of commissioned illustrations (including some bizarrely erotic images for men's magazines) and — importantly — a significant role in the success of Games Workshop, Ltd.; England's wildly popular publisher of role-playing games, equivalent to our own TSR™, developer of *Dungeons and Dragons*™.

Well known for his black-and-white work for *Realms of Chaos* and *Space Marine*, two well-known products of this role-playing game company, Miller's best color artwork, however, can be found on the covers of GW's *White Dwarf* magazine (comparable to TSR's

Dragon™ magazine) and the Fighting Fantasy series of books published by Steve Jackson and Ian Livingstone, for the role-playing game of the same name. Looking back at this body of work, it's clear Miller's artistic efforts have made a liar out of his early art teacher, "Old Dribble," who judged his efforts as "bereft of all feeling."

By the '90s, Miller was in "full bloom" (or, as he might phrase it, "full rot"), if his graphic novels *The Luck in the Head* (co-authored by M. John Harrison, Gollancz Pub., 1991) and *The City* (co-authored by James Herbert, Pan MacMillan Pub., 1994) are any indication. Fully illustrated books by Miller continue to be published, most notably Poe's *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* (Oxford University Press, 1993), Gene Wolfe's *Bibliomen* (Broken Mirror Press, 1994) and Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* (Oxford University Press, 1995) as do individual titles, by major publishers, too numerous to list.

At the same time, Miller has been busily penning lyrics to hypothetical Broadway musicals, with first lines like "Scarecrows chew their fingers, whilst crows talk in circles ..." and making a major contribution to Wizards of the Coast's juggernaut of a role-playing card game *Magic: The Gathering*. Sue Ann Harkey, former *Magic* Art Director, credits Miller's element of surprise, unpredictability, and theatricality for the popularity of his art among gamers.

"What might be a hindrance for some artists," says Harkey, referring to Miller's readily identifiable visual signature, "was considered ingenious by Wizards (of the Coast), and an inspiration to other artists working for *Magic*, especially those who aspired to command a following among players of the game on the strength of their artistic vision.

As the Millenium nears, Miller has several personal creative projects in progress, some of them long term, such as his graphic novel *Hollywood Gothic* (begun in the late '70s), together with the film treatment for same; *Suzie Pellet*, another more recent graphic novel in progress; *The Shingle Dance*, a major theater dance project; and *Enclosures*, a planned solo exhibition of his newest works at Brighton College, concurrent with the Brighton Festival, 1998.

Elizabeth Bowen, a novelist and critic writing on Mervyn Peake's *Titus Groan* in the illustrated book *Realms of Fantasy*, commented that Peake's work "owed nothing to fashion, little to any of his contemporaries, and not much to any predecessor." The same might be said of Ian Miller. ♣

Scarecrows chew their nails,
Until they bleed.
But they know a lie when they hear it.

Excerpt from planned "Enclosures"
Exhibition Catalog 1998

Some Say Role Playing Is Dead...

